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Against Accountability: Oppression and Oversight in Los Angeles

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Anthropology

by

Matthew James Schneider

2022

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Against Accountability: Oppression and Oversight in Los Angeles

by

Matthew James Schneider

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Hannah C. Appel, Chair

This thesis considers Los Angeles in theory and in history, examining key social institutions like the university and the police for the work of “the prevailing oppression,” what Angela Davis opposed while she was an assistant professor at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1969, surveilled, harassed, and fired for her politics. I trace the influence on law and racial order of the under-examined nexus of collaborations and contestations between university students and staff and police in this city. Contradictions cluster here around the ideal and practice of “accountability,” a widely prominent regime of knowledge and power in recent decades, the preconditions and effects of which have often been taken for granted or left ignored. Drawing together insights of abolitionist movements and semiotic anthropology, I demonstrate how prevailing institutions in Los Angeles have resisted and incorporated popular pursuits of “accountability” in equal measure.

The thesis of Matthew James Schneider is approved.

Jessica R. Cattelino

Erin K. Debenport

Hannah C. Appel, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

Against Accountability

Oppression and Oversight in Los Angeles

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List of Key Abbreviations

AAA	American Anthropological Association
AACT	American Advisory Council for Thailand
AID	U.S. Agency for International Development
ARPA	[Defense] Advanced Research Projects Agency
CIA	Central Intelligence Administration
COINTELPRO	Counterintelligence Program (FBI)
CRASH	Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (LAPD)
CSP	Community Safety Partnership (LAPD)
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
LAPD	Los Angeles Police Department
LASER	[Operation] Los Angeles Strategic Extraction and Recovery (LAPD)
LEAA	Law Enforcement Assistance Administration
N.H.I.	“No Humans Involved”
UC	University of California
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
USC	University of Southern California

List of Key LAPD Chiefs and Los Angeles Mayors

Chiefs of Police, Los Angeles Police Department

August Vollmer (1923-1924)

William H. Parker (1950-1966)

Edward M. Davis (1969-1978)

Daryl F. Gates (1978-1992)

Willie L. Williams (1992-1997)

Bernard C. Parks (1997-2002)

William J. Bratton (2002-2009)

Charles L. Beck (2009-2018)

Michel Moore (2018-present)

Mayors, City of Los Angeles

Samuel W. Yorty (1961-1973)

Thomas Bradley (1973-1993)

Richard J. Riordan (1993-2001)

James K. Hahn (2001-2005)

Antonio Villaraigosa (2005-2013)

Eric Garcetti (2013-2022)

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Introduction

*The seams of that fine fabric,
that that Los Angeles image that we have?
That California? That sunshine?
You know?
See we showed the insides.
The core.*

Anna Deavere Smith ([1993] 2003), *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*

i. Apartheid, Los Angeles

Bernard Makhosezwe Magubane left Johannesburg for Los Angeles on December 21, 1961.¹ Five days earlier, the militant wing of the African National Congress [ANC]—uMkhonto we Sizwe, formed in response to the massacre at Sharpeville the year prior—set off its first bombs against the apartheid South African government, exploding government buildings in Durban. If Magubane had not already secured an opportunity to study for a PhD in sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA] and (more difficult still) a passport to come to the U.S. and had not already left his home in Natal, the South African government would have arrested him in their crackdown on political opponents, just as they soon captured and imprisoned leaders in uMkhonto we Sizwe, including co-founder Nelson Mandela, and many other ANC members struggling for the end of apartheid and colonial rule. As it was, Magubane was in transit and, traveling without signs of belonging to the ANC, avoided arrest.

Magubane arrived to UCLA at the height of Cold War investment in universities and outreach to foreign students (among whom even anticolonial activists could pass on occasion)

¹ All information on Magubane's time in L.A. is drawn from a 2004 interview conducted by William Minter for a history of African anticolonial activism in the U.S. (Minter et al. 2007) and published online on the accompanying platform NoEasyVictories.org, as well as recent historical work by Mychal Matsemela-Ali Odom (2017, 2021).

and, quite differently, at the start of a period of extraordinary political activism on campus and off.² The exile of Magubane and a cohort of other South African radicals (among them Anthony Ngubo and Martin Legassick) to Los Angeles intensified their struggle and made it transnational, intersecting with other civil rights and, later, emergent Black Power formations at the university and in the region (Odom 2021).³ The parallels were readily apparent: many Black Angelenos were themselves exiles (or children of exiles) from the Jim Crow South, not long migrated to California.⁴ Indeed, Magubane and his comrades were inspired by participation in statewide civil rights protests organized by the Congress on Racial Equality [CORE] and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] against businesses refusing to hire Black workers in California, as in Mississippi, to organize what historians have pointed to as the first anti-apartheid demonstration in Los Angeles—at the intersection of Wilshire and Beverly boulevards, not far from UCLA’s Westwood campus—against a bank selling Krugerrands, the South African gold coin (Odom 2021; cf. Johnson 1999).

As was already clear to Black, radical, and Black radical South Africans in that country and in exile—and as would be analyzed nowhere better than in Magubane’s (1979) study of *The Political Economy of Race & Class in South Africa*—the maintenance of apartheid rule in South Africa relied upon the demand for South African gold in the international monetary system, even beyond the demise of the Bretton Woods arrangement and the (quasi) gold standard. South

² In the summer of 1961, e.g., a number of UCLA students—among them Robert and Helen Singleton—had traveled to Mississippi and other southern states as part of the anti-segregationist Freedom Rides organized by the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) (Arsenault 2006).

³ As Ntongela Masilela later insisted: “It needs to be recalled that Magubane was one of the extraordinary intellectual pillars of the African National Congress during the exile period” (Ngidi & Masilela 2005: 59).

⁴ I draw the exile formulation from Donna Murch’s (2010: 5) history of Black Panther organizing in Oakland, which further quotes Huey P. Newton (1973: 14): “The great exodus of poor people out of the South during World War II sprang from the hope for a better life in the big cities of the North and West. In search of freedom, they left behind centuries of southern cruelty and repression... The Black communities of Bedford-Stuyvesant, Newark, Brownsville, Watts, and Detroit and many others stand as testament that racism is as oppressive in the North as in the South. Oakland is no different.”

African gold in turn relied upon the organization and “emiseration” of African migrant labor in gold mines and displacement of “the social costs of reproduction” onto households in “reserves” or Bantustans (Magubane 1979: 96-101). For Magubane, *this* political economy predated and moreover provided the “model” for Afrikaner nationalist rule in 1948, leading him to declare that juridically formalized apartheid was “only a new name for an old process,” which he otherwise called colonialism and *racist* capitalism (Magubane 1979: 3, 16, 54, 117, 226; cf. Hudson 2018; Burden-Stelly et al. 2020). So, thought Magubane (1979: 141), “[o]nly if we examine the various laws” most identified with and as *apartheid* (racial codifications, segregations, prohibitions) “in the context of various class demands on African labor can we fathom why and how apartheid makes sense.”

This conclusion helps make retroactive sense of Magubane’s earlier activism in Los Angeles with his multinational comrades. Beyond organizing with the ANC in exile and against the South African government’s footholds of political and/or economic support in the U.S. (Jackson 1970), Magubane committed his activist energies in L.A. to studying and challenging the devaluation and discrimination faced by Black workers in the area. Working with his South African compatriot and UCLA colleague Anthony Ngubo to research the experience of “unemployed youth” in the Los Angeles County suburb of Pasadena (Odom 2021), Magubane carefully emphasized Black Californians’ own sense of “the ‘white power structure’ and race prejudice,” both *before* and *after* the pivotal Watts Rebellion in August 1965 that punctuated their research period (quoted in Birkinshaw 1965).

This power structure could also be called *apartheid* and, indeed, had already been called as much: Alexander Saxton had diagnosed Southern California’s own “genteel apartheid” in a 1961 article for the left-wing magazine *Frontier*. What instigated Saxton’s (1961) commentary

was the apparent racial exclusivity (whites only) of a skilled-trade job training program in the “free and sovereign State of California,” which had formally prohibited racial discrimination in government programs since World War II. For Saxton, “genteel apartheid” named the banality of a society structured in racial domination but with increasingly muted or covert displays of racist prejudice.⁵ As this thesis will discuss at length, the Watts Rebellion of 1965 came as such a surprise to L.A. city leaders because they thought southern California was a haven of opportunity compared to Jim Crow Southern states (Martinez HoSang 2010). Keeping Black workers in subordinate service was the central, naturalized, mostly unthought paradigm of “genteel apartheid” in Sixties L.A. In this respect, Magubane and Saxton’s work—and the radical milieu in which they were each, differently, situated—together conveyed that not only was the United States connected to apartheid South Africa through the international gold system but that there were readily comparable forms of white-supremacist domination in the U.S., not only in “the South” but also in sunny southern California.

Magubane eventually left for professorships elsewhere, Saxton (transitioning from journalist to historian) joined the faculty at UCLA, and anti-apartheid solidarity work continued in California throughout the 1970s and ‘80s (Odom 2017). Understandings of apartheid *in* Los Angeles returned to prominence in a series of landmark political texts, stretching from Cynthia Hamilton’s pamphlet *Apartheid in an American City: The Case of the Black Community in Los Angeles* (1989) through Mike Davis’s *City of Quartz* (1990) to Sylvia Wynter’s “‘No Humans Involved’: An Open Letter to My Colleagues” ([1992] 1994) and two essays by Ruth Wilson Gilmore published in 1993.⁶ Since the ‘60s, much had changed in Los Angeles and beyond. In

⁵ This formulation of *apartheid* is a key to reading Saxton’s important later histories of Anti-Chinese politics (1971) and white settlement in 19th- and 20th-century California (1990), both of which hinge on the articulation of racist hierarchy (specifically white domination) with “class conflict and compromise” (see also Hall 1980).

⁶ For Hamilton, Davis, and Gilmore, “apartheid” was an explicit keyword. Wynter, with her idiosyncratic theoretical vocabulary, all-but-names apartheid but does invoke “the Bantustan” as a geographic and intellectual mode of

South Africa, Afrikaner rule seemed on its last legs—and imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, of course, did not.⁷ Three local developments register most sharply in this wave of writing. First, Tom Bradley, a former officer in the Los Angeles Police Department, had become L.A.’s first Black mayor in 1973. Unlike a contemporaneous wave of Black mayors in other major cities (Thompson 2005), Bradley’s victory was less a triumph of grassroots organizing than the incorporation and neutralization of post-Civil Rights Era Black political organization into the ruling coalition of the city government (cf. Felker-Kantor 2018). Second, the Southern California economy had begun experiencing a post-industrial reordering—or the end of the “fifty-year reich of California’s economic miracle” (Gilmore 1993a: 75)—a hemorrhaging of jobs countervailed only by transnational inflows of speculative real estate investment as well as cocaine (cf. Murch 2015). Third, relatedly, the state of California and the U.S. federal government undertook an extraordinary expansion of the carceral apparatus of policing and prisons, expressions of Wars on Drugs and Gangs (cf. Gilmore 2007). While Chief of Police in Los Angeles in 1923-1924, August Vollmer—hailed as the “father of modern policing” as well as the founder of criminology at the University of California—was reputed to have lectured to a room of three hundred police officers, “After all we’re conducting a war, a war against the enemies of society and we must never forget that” (quoted in Parker 1961: 144).⁸ War is not a metaphor (James 2007; Singh 2017; Murch 2020; Rodríguez 2020a),⁹ and old habits die hard.

ordering. Around the same time, in 1993, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton would publish *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, an influential work in urban sociology.

⁷ Imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy, of course, was a central thematic/target in the analysis of the late bell hooks.

⁸ August Vollmer came by his militarism naturally, as a veteran of the U.S. empire’s brutal policing operations in the Philippines during the Spanish-American War of 1898, operations which continued long after to suppress Filipino revolutionary and national independence movements (McCoy 2009; Schrader 2019; Go 2020).

⁹ Long ago, Marx and Engels ([1848] 1888) wrote of the “more or less veiled civil war, raging within existing society,” alternately more and less veiled but rarely ceasing since in most of the world.

These three connected developments would explode in the 1992 L.A. Uprising, in the wake of non-guilty verdicts for the LAPD officers involved in the videotaped beating of Rodney King and for the Korean convenience store owner who had shot and killed Latasha Harlins, a 15 year old Black girl, the year prior (Deavere Smith [1993] 2003; Gooding-Williams 1993; Stevenson 2013). Yet, it is telling and crucially important that the likes of Hamilton, Davis, and others were writing about *apartheid* in Los Angeles years before these spectacular events. The archival record of pamphlets, books, and journals discussed here offers only a trace of a rich and righteous world of struggle and thought in L.A. that these authors themselves and many other activists and historians have kept alive and carried on. In this second conjuncture of the late 1980s-early 1990s, what Hamilton, Davis, Wynter, and Gilmore each pinpointed as apartheid was the increasing disposability of Black people (especially the category Wynter refers to as “young Black males”) no longer useful or valuable for exploitation as labor, rendered “surplus” in ways enabling or seeming to necessitate new forms of warehousing in penal institutions and war on the streets.¹⁰ Cynthia Hamilton (1989, 1992) characterized South Central, one of L.A.’s predominantly Black neighborhoods, as a “Bantustan,” which “like its counterparts in South Africa serves now only as a holding space for Blacks who are no longer of use to the larger economy,” a phenomenon Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1993a) similarly framed as “american apartheid’s geographical enclavism.” What Hamilton (1989) saw “inevitably” on the horizon was the banishment of Black people from Historic South Central “to be replaced without a trace” by a “more prosperous—and probably whiter—class of people,” for “the land is valuable and the present tenants are not.” This eliminatory logic played out in policing and incarceration. Mike Davis (1990: 226-228) further highlighted how this “class war (sometimes a continuation of the

¹⁰ Wynter ([1992] 1994) also invokes James Baldwin’s (1985) notion of “captive population,” drawn from his reflections on racism, policing, and a horrific series of (“unsolved”) murders of children in Atlanta a few years prior.

race war of the 1960s),” consolidating “urban apartheid” and ensuring ballooning budgets and unqualified impunity for L.A. Police and Sheriff’s departments and an archipelago of jails and prisons, was “reinforce[d] and justif[ied]” by racist moral panics about “killer youth gangs high on crack.”¹¹

Together, these spatial/racial/capitalist coordinates underwrote the acronym “N.H.I.” used by Los Angeles law enforcement to refer, as Sylvia Wynter ([1992] 1994: 42) famously reflected, to “any case involving a breach of the rights of young Black males who belong to the jobless category of the inner city ghettos,” like south L.A.; “N. H. I. means ‘no humans involved.’” Elaborating on ideas from W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), Frantz Fanon ([1961] 2004), and Elsa Goveia (1970), Wynter insists that “‘race’ cannot be reduced as an issue to anything else” but functions precisely to “*pre-determine*” the relationship of “the color line” to “the sharply unequal re-distribution of the collectively produced global resources” ([1992] 1994: 47, 52-53). However, since the Sixties and the post-Civil Rights reordering of things (cf. Ferguson 2012), this relationship transmuted such that what Wynter called “the category of the owners/jobholders... of whatever race” (she mentions Bill Cosby and his TV persona Cliff Huxtable, others might mention Mayor Bradley) have been “assimilated to the category of ‘Whites,’” inversely proportional to how “the opposed category of the non-owners and the non-jobholders are assimilated to the category of the ‘young Black males,’” the category of “no humans involved” ([1992] 1994: 53). In this way, race sustains “the systemic condemnation of all the Rodney Kings, and of the global Poor and Jobless, to the futility and misery of the lives they live” and the lives condemned to carcerality and premature death (70).¹² These are the stakes of apartheid

¹¹ See also Stuart Hall et al. (1978) on the racist “moral panic” of “mugging” in the U.K.

¹² Part of Gilmore’s (2007) influential definition of racism—the notion of “premature death” comes from the *We Charge Genocide* petition to the United Nations by the Civil Rights Congress (1951).

in Los Angeles, the “price” paid for others’ “well-being”—Wynter says “*our*,” meaning academics, though perhaps specifically “Black intellectuals” (56, 70).

In much of the critique from this era, these radical scholars detected a kind of white paranoia-cum-jouissance—exercised by uniformed law enforcement officers or by the unofficially deputized protectors of the racial order—that they, and the broader movements they belonged to and worked for, often called *fascism* (Marable 1985; Davis 1990; Gilmore 1993a, 1993b).¹³ What’s more, they showed how these psychosocial tendencies coincided with—sometimes cohesively, sometimes in conflict or compromise (Saxton 1990)—with profit-generating distributions of property, finance, and contracts, at a time of slowing federal investment in welfare and (less so, only momentarily) warfare.¹⁴ LAPD officers’ assault against Rodney King and use of the term “N.H.I.”/“No Humans Involved” offers plenty of evidence of the fascist (hence racist) effervescence of violence and affect, whether compensation for some social changes (expansion of Civil Rights, deindustrialization, “end” of Cold War) or cause of others (tax revolt, “organized abandonment,” growth of the prison-industrial complex).¹⁵

But at least as important as fascist fanaticism or racial-capitalist profit-maximization in reproducing apartheid in Los Angeles, especially in Wynter’s and Gilmore’s analysis, was the university and its academic populace, supposed by the middle of the 20th century to be the very

¹³ In “Terror Austerity Race Gender Excess Theater,” riffing on turns of phrase by Toni Negri and Amiri Baraka, Gilmore (1993b: 26) elaborated: “The ‘static reproduction of class relations’ is a complicated enterprise. It is hardly accomplished simply from the top down, even with the might of the state’s coercive apparatus. A significant proportion of the people whose relations are reproduced must concretely consent to the arrangement, however displaced their understanding. In the U.S., where real and imagined social relations are expressed most rigidly in race/gender hierarchies, the ‘reproduction’ is in fact a *production* and its by-products, fear and fury, are in service of a ‘changing same’: the apartheid local of American nationalism.”

¹⁴ See also, e.g., Cheryl I. Harris’s (1993) “Whiteness as Property” and George Lipsitz’s (1995) “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness.”

¹⁵ For more reflections on these late-20th century developments (often collapsed into or obscured by the notion of “neoliberalism”), see essential work by Gilmore (2007), Melinda Cooper (2017), and Donna Murch (2020).

embodiments of cool-headed, open-minded, disinterested inquiry and, towards the end of the 20th century, of multicultural progressivism. “Supposed,” at least. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1993a: 71, 76-77) diagnosed how the making of “public enemies” through racist moral panics went hand in hand with the making of “private intellectuals,” incentivizing scholars toward “personal gain” and careerism (or showing some form of these interests to have been there all along) through the splitting of “oppositional talk” from “oppositional walk.” Apartheid in the U.S., Gilmore (1993a: 77) argued, required both tendencies—criminalizing collective categories and proffering individual opportunities—to “legitimate” and “safeguard[] the unequal distribution of resources” in late capitalist society.¹⁶ The ranking/sorting/categorizing University was key in these processes. Sylvia Wynter ([1992] 1994: 55) took this point even further, describing the episteme underwriting and propagated by “our present global university system” as the “central institutional mechanisms which integrate and regulate our present world system.” As she wrote in her open letter to colleagues that “it is we in academia who alone hold the key to ‘race,’ and therefore to the classificatory logic of the acronym, N.H.I.” (Wynter [1992] 1994: 47).

Apartheid in Los Angeles, and the university’s role in integrating and regulating it, returns to the fore in a third, contemporary conjuncture with the abolitionist organizing and critical study of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition. Founded in 2011 and centered in Skid Row (a neighborhood in downtown L.A. of predominantly Black and unhoused or precariously housed folks that is among the most heavily policed areas in the United States), Stop LAPD Spying Coalition frames its struggle as a confrontation with “policing’s origins in enslavement, colonization, apartheid, and imperialism.”¹⁷ When Stop LAPD Spying and its members speak of

¹⁶ On the university’s incorporation, or “pacification and incorporation” (Wynter 2006), of minority/“oppositional” people and knowledge practices, see also work by Roderick Ferguson (2012) and Charisse Burden-Stelly (2018).

¹⁷ See stoplapdspying.org/about.

apartheid, they most often refer to Israeli settler-colonialism in Palestine, the case to which the label “apartheid” has been applied most prominently and persistently in recent decades (Clarno 2017; Makdisi 2022) since South Africa was popularly (and in many ways incorrectly) imagined to have become “post-apartheid.”¹⁸ For the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a), Skid Row and other hyper-policed enclaves of Los Angeles and Gaza and many other hyper-policed enclaves of Palestine are not only comparable but connected, through the sharing of resources, strategies, and technologies of surveillance as well as containment *and* displacement, this dialectic that Ananya Roy (2019) has called “racial banishment.”

The shift from South Africa to Israel as exemplars of apartheid regimes in Los Angeles activists’ own theorization and in wider scholarly conversations has mapped along with an evolution in the critical theory of apartheid. For instance, Saree Makdisi (2018) has distinguished the organization of South African apartheid around the “exploitation of black labor” from the organization of Israeli apartheid around the incapacitation, “annihilation,” and elimination of Palestinians from Palestine.¹⁹ This evolution tracks all too well with the history of Los Angeles too quickly recounted in this introduction: a shift from the containment and exploitation of Black people as subservient labor to the containment and elimination of the Black and multiracial jobless class, *les damnés* of Los Angeles, by the police and prison-industrial complex and other forms of banishment (cf. Costa Vargas 2006, 2010). It bears making clear that this history is not simply a Black-and-white story, though Black and white have often been important orienting

¹⁸ On “post-apartheid” apartheid in South Africa, see work by Patrick Bond (2004), Neville Alexander (2013), and Xavier Livermon (2018), as well as the Fees Must Fall movement (cf. Booysen 2016). Extending beyond but encompassing Palestine has been a contemporary turn led by the likes of Faye V. Harrison (2002) to theorize apartheid at the “global” scale (see also Mullings 2009), extending earlier radical understandings of the imperial world-system as racial formation (e.g., Du Bois 1920) and popularized in recent frameworks such as eco-apartheid and vaccine apartheid during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. A parallel, closely related framework has emerged from the same influences to theorize global white supremacy (Mills 1998; Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre 2020).

¹⁹ Beyond the particularities of colonial violence in Palestine, the mobilization of super-exploitable labor still pertains as a key function of global apartheid (Besteman 2020).

poles in the social life of racialization in L.A. broadly (if not “the world”) and in the local tradition of theorizing this formation—for instance, in Wynter’s ([1992] 1994) provocative notion that differently classed people (jobholder or jobless) are racialized and “assimilated” to the categories of White or Black respectively. Still, the first people incarcerated and enslaved in Los Angeles were Indigenous people, caged on Spanish missions in the 18th century (Lytle Hernández 2017). Since then, the settler state of California has been the site, *inter alia*, of Chinese exclusion, Japanese internment, anti-Chicano (“Zoot Suit”) race riots, and “War on Terror” surveillance and harassment of Muslims, Arabs, and Sikhs and others racialized along those lines (an early incitement for the formation of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition). Yet California has also been the site of concentrated political movement by all such racialized and oppressed groups and more against white supremacy in its judicial and extrajudicial forms.

As one such political movement intimately connected and in solidarity with a much wider range of political actors, the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a) challenges and works toward the abolition of the broad “architecture of surveillance” upholding the white-supremacist “stalker state” in L.A. and beyond. Troubling the apartheid geographies of the sprawling city, the Coalition has frequently pinpointed and campaigned against the forms of collaboration and “complicity” connecting sites of immiseration and policing to the (mostly) serene campuses of Los Angeles’s elite universities, including UCLA some 12 miles to the west. Chief among these collaborations in recent years have been policing and surveillance technologies, including the for-profit “predictive policing” firm PredPol developed by a team of applied mathematicians, criminologists, and anthropologists based at UCLA (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2018). Born of research conducted by the UCLA-based team in collaboration with the U.S. military for application in the so-called “War on Terror,” and promoted through a racialized imaginary of

“terrorists” and “gangs” (Winston & BondGraham 2014; Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a), PredPol purported that its proprietary algorithm could uniquely assess vast amounts of crime and environmental data and predict “hotspots” where “property crime” was at greatest risk of occurring. PredPol’s hotspot maps would indicate to police departments where to assign officers to shifts in those vicinities as deterrents. However, as the scholar of carceral technologies and geographies Brian Jefferson (2020: 124) has argued emphatically:

the real-world function of predictive policing is not to see crime before it happens but to graft scientific authority onto entrenched forms of racialized policing. [...] Crime diffusion risk, hot spot matrices, nearest neighborhood hierarchical clusters, near-repeat patterns—‘whatever the name used, whatever the latest expression,’ the point is to assist the state in managing stigmatized populations.

PredPol quite strikingly corresponds in two key ways with the coordinates of what radical thinkers and movements in Los Angeles have for decades theorized as *apartheid*.

First, LAPD’s operationalization of PredPol in downtown Los Angeles served to “automate[] patrols at what had been traditionally called the ‘buffer zones’ of the containment strategy long used to contain Skid Row,” as the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a) discovered through a years-long campaign of public records requests and community mobilization. The real-world effect of PredPol’s “property crime” analytics was further “restriction, enclosure, and punishment” of Skid Row’s stigmatized community, combined by the LAPD with its correspondent tactical program Operation LASER “to brutalize and banish people at locations targeted for gentrification” (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a). Cynthia Hamilton and others understood this two-step containment and expulsion in motion in apartheid Los Angeles decades ago. PredPol and Operation LASER represent only new names for old processes of colonialism and “racist capitalism” (Magubane 1979). Second, just as Sylvia Wynter and Ruth Wilson Gilmore understood the intentional or unthought partnership of intellectuals to be essential in

upholding apartheid rule in the late-20th century, the carceral power of “scientific authority” nurtured in the University and in Technology industries has only intensified in our ever more data-driven age (Jefferson 2020). The academic bonafides of PredPol were key to its rise in the algorithmic policing market. In fact, the same academics who founded, invested in, and profited from PredPol ‘scientifically’ evaluated its effectiveness, promoting to potential clients statistical findings that showed favorable effects from PredPol’s use and declining to share with clients findings that indicated a tradeoff between “racial bias” and algorithmic “accuracy” (Sankin et al. 2021). After the murders by police of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade, a group of mathematicians calling for a boycott of academic collaborations with policing—and taking PredPol as their key example—wrote in an open letter, “It is simply too easy to create a ‘scientific’ veneer for racism” (Aougab et al. 2020).²⁰

Six years earlier, the Chair of the UCLA Venture Capital Fund wrote to request investment into PredPol from the UCLA Foundation, the university’s “philanthropic” and sometimes capital-generating arm. In a letter accessed in a public records request by the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a), the venture capitalist described how “from a market perspective,” PredPol (with its many UCLA connections) seemed a “good bet for us to place,” as “a company that enables a city to reduce crime and save money.” The UCLA Foundation purchased 80,645 shares of preferred stock in PredPol for the price of \$0.124 per share (\$9,998 total), standing to win (for the sake of the university’s endowment) upon selling the shares if PredPol’s success were to result in a later stock offering and a rise in stock price. PredPol’s success would then be success for UCLA ventures but also the “restriction, enclosure, and punishment” of algorithmic and scientifically-authorized policing for the poor and unhoused Black and brown community of Skid Row 12 miles away. Call it apartheid, Los Angeles.

²⁰ The boycott letter eventually tallied more than 1,400 signatures from mathematicians (Castelvecchi 2020).

ii. Grounds

Whether or not “genteel” remains an apt descriptor for apartheid in Los Angeles, as it was for Alexander Saxton in 1961, is up for debate. Nevertheless, this thesis concerns how the prevailing apartheid social order of policing remains broadly disguisable (in ‘scientific’ and other veneers) and officially disavowable, on one hand, and so fiercely challenged by radical political movements like the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, on the other. I opened this thesis by sketching a brief intellectual history of a commitment to naming and confronting “apartheid” in Los Angeles. What follows builds on this opening sketch in three main ways.

First, the sketch maps the grounds for this thesis: Los Angeles since the 1960s. Throughout, I will revisit the historically conjunctures in which (and *because of which*) the critique of apartheid was voiced most insistently, which might roughly be called “the 1960s,” “the 1990s,” and “the present,” circa 2014–now).²¹ The Watts uprising in 1965, the LAPD’s beating of Rodney King in 1991 and the Los Angeles rebellion that followed in 1992, and the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 and the ensuing national and international rebellion are key events in this history, the insistence on apartheid as social structure and social relations helps (as above) to insist that these events are “not a moment in time, but a continuation of history,” in the words of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2017, 2021a). *Apartheid* as analytic for the interrelations of race, political economy, and law undergirds my approach to policing in subsequent chapters but will not be fully restated as such, except in passing.

Second, this history of the movement against apartheid Los Angeles raised the contradictions surrounding the university as a social institution in the United States and surrounding the University of California, Los Angeles, in particular. These contradictions are a

²¹ What this thesis lacks in the manifestation of conjunctural analysis is made up for only in the aspiration toward it.

central concern of this thesis, especially the following chapter. Many thinkers I have invoked admirably have studied or taught at UCLA; I study at UCLA and am inspired by and grateful to so many of my classmates and teachers—many of whom themselves organized actions, resolutions, and open letters against PredPol in collaboration with the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (Moravec 2019; Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2019a; *Stop LAPD Spying Coalition v. City of Los Angeles* 2021). Like any social institution, if more dramatically than most, this university is a contested terrain. There are people who have worked or still work at UCLA whose work I—along with many others before and with me—find objectionable or abhorrent. (Far more work demands objection than I can discuss here or, I suspect, even know about.) As with the founders and funders of PredPol, and as I will trace more widely below, some people in this university have caused great harm to others in the practice of policing (to name only one realm of harm, the focus of this thesis), sometimes inadvertently and sometimes with well-documented intentions. I am precisely concerned with the ethics, politics, and social effects of knowledge, on and off campus, problems that university leaders may prefer were ignored or at least handled in institutional forums and in institutional terms; I am not concerned here with passing judgment on specific individuals, even though I name many.

This, third, I take to be the crucial moral and political implication of understanding apartheid as a (local and global) formation: against apartheid, *abolition* as horizon and method (e.g., Rodríguez 2019; Critical Resistance 2020; Kaba 2021; Purnell 2021; Gilmore 2022). That is, this thesis is not designed first as censure or condemnation but as a small effort to recover from more and less obscurity some histories of policing and the politics of knowledge and to perhaps uncover some practices, terms, and conditions through which the apartheid carceral order has been reproduced and expanded—or, conversely, challenged and undermined. Without

aiming to rehabilitate “the university” or “social science” as themselves “good” or “just,” this project is born of and committed to the collective efforts to make these sites (among many) where abolition happens rather than (as they have more often been) where colonialism, apartheid, and carceral violence happen and then get justified, disguised, or silenced (Wynter [1992] 1994; Trouillot 1995).²² Working through contradictions, this thesis is also a document of admiration and hope for what can be done, what has been done, and what is being done at the/this university (e.g., Cops Off Campus; the Divest Coalition) as well as in and beyond the discipline of anthropology (e.g., Burton 2016; Shange 2019; Debenport et al. 2021).

Decades ago, Bernard Magubane and his colleague James Faris (1985: 97) criticized how “[r]ather than examine the oppression and oppressors, anthropology examines the oppressed.” In doing so, anthropology served “the architects of imperialism” by “provid[ing] if not ideological rationalizations for their brutal actions, certainly analyses of the consequences that masked oppression” (100). By contrast, the only future for the discipline that Magubane and Faris (1985: 102) would accept would be a practice that could “focus political objection—but then, does it not cease to be the anthropology we know?” Some of the worst of the old oppression-masking (and sometimes -rationalizing) tendencies have surely persisted, as this thesis will examine. But many brilliant and focused people working in anthropology have brought radical political possibilities to life, including a Black women-led “decolonizing generation” (Allen & Jobson 2016; cf. Bolles 2013), which frequently examined oppression under the name *global apartheid* (e.g., Harrison 2002; Mullings 2009). Savannah Shange (2019) has further called this tradition one of “abolitionist anthropology.”

²² Along with the history of slavery and settler-colonial land grabs upon which the U.S. university system was built (Wilder 2013; Lee & Ahtone 2020), as with all capital in the U.S., I am thinking of work on social-scientific methods (Zuberi & Bonilla Silva 2008) and multiculturalism (Ahmed 2012; Ferguson 2012) in the university as key mechanisms of the ongoingness of white supremacist apartheid.

The abolitionist ethos—as nurtured today in collective social movements like INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, Critical Resistance (an organization crystallized out of an academic/activist conference on the prison-industrial complex at the University of California, Santa Cruz), and the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition—does not stop at examining or even voicing objection to oppression. Calling apartheid “apartheid” does not end apartheid; ending “apartheid,” as in South Africa, does not always end apartheid; old processes find new names. In wholly materialist ways, abolitionists go beyond names and critiques alone to organize toward two ends, (1) working to dismantle oppressive carceral processes in their entirety at the same time as, *only possibly because*, (2) working to expand and build life-sustaining forms of care.

Inspired by vibrant and expanding abolitionist movements in Los Angeles and beyond, concentrated outside the university (and if within, *only possibly because* connected ‘outside’), this thesis makes two small contributions of examination and critique en route to organizing. The first part of this thesis examines the contradictory role of the University (UCLA, in particular) as social institution enlisted in upholding the U.S. carceral order—what Angela Y. Davis, while an assailed professor at UCLA in 1969, called “the prevailing oppression”—and as site of social movements with transformative ambitions, repeatedly subject to policing, counterinsurgency, and co-optation.²³ Better understanding the University’s history with (and against) the Police helps make sense of what complicities and oppressions remain unaddressed and unchanged, what rebellions have been silenced but not stolen of promise, and what forms of knowledge mediate the two—so as to better organize against apartheid carcerality and for abolitionist possibility.²⁴

²³ Dean Spade (2015: 13) has glossed *co-optation* as how “the words and ideas of resistance movements are frequently recast to produce results that disserve the initial purposes for which they were deployed, and instead become legitimizing tools for white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, ableist political agendas.”

²⁴ The approach to these issues taken here is inspired by the movement research of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (e.g., 2018, 2021a), an emerging wave of “abolitionist university studies” (Boggs et al. 2019), and forms of rebellious study that avoid classification (cf. Moten & Harney 2013).

iii. On and Against Accountability

The second part of this thesis examines the contradictory forms of knowledge that circulate through and around the ideal and practice of “accountability”—which has quite distinct but intersecting histories on most sides of the apartheid/abolitionist divide.

Consider the case of PredPol, the “predictive policing” software founded at UCLA. In a 2019 open letter to the Los Angeles Police Commission (the “independent” “civilian” “oversight” board of the LAPD), first written by a collective of UCLA graduate students and faculty and ultimately signed by over 450 scholars nationally and internationally, *accountability* appears as a value to counteract the supposed harms of PredPol. Conscious that the academic credentials of PredPol’s founding (the “objective” standards of data and peer-review) had been repeatedly invoked by LAPD Chief Michel Moore as justification for contracting with the software firm, the letter-writers concluded:

We appreciate that the LAPD is paying attention to academic literature, and we encourage them to also review the scholarship that raises questions about Predpol, highlights the dangers of all algorithm- and location-based policing, and asks why crime algorithms, and not accountability, continue to be the priority of departments like the LAPD. (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2019b)

For all the evident measurement of tone, belying the more unrelentingly radical demands made elsewhere by many of the signatories, the letter challenges the possibility of the algorithm as technological fix to the indiscriminately discriminatory violence of policing amid years of popular outcry against police officers’ lethal anti-Blackness (Taylor 2016; Ransby 2018; Benjamin 2019), sometimes reduced to all-too-human notions of “bias” (Seigel 2017). Instead of digital technology, the critical academics call (implicitly, through the play of the negative) for “accountability,” a social relation that would seem to better meet the “ethical obligation” of scholarship (a do-no-harm principle) and would denaturalize and counteract “policies and

practices that have had disparate impacts on Black and Brown communities” (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2019b). Read as generously as they deserve, these scholars should not be understood as replacing the algorithmic fix offered by PredPol with an accountability fix, but instead channeling a popular demand (for “accountability” *is* popular) into an institutional body (the Police Commission) that is supposed to be responsive to public entreaties of this sort. “Accountability,” here, would in its most maximal sense be an obligation to cease present-and-future harms and properly reckon with past-and-present harms; in fact, there is a long tradition of thinking about and experimenting with accountability praxis in anti-carceral and abolitionist movements (e.g., Kim 2011). If followed through to the logical conclusions of most of the letter-writers and signatories, such a cessation and reckoning could very well amount to the end of policing and imprisonment altogether, understood to be intrinsically harmful. (The following year, 2020, after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tony McDade, and too many others, many of these signatories would be prominent advocates for abolition of the prison-industrial complex, advocating on and off campus. But 2019 was not 2020.)

What followed, instead, followed a twisted logic of its own. As I detail at greater length in the second part of this thesis, Chief Moore did end LAPD’s contract with PredPol in the spring of 2020—a victory for the movements calling for the dismantling of surveillance and algorithmic policing technologies, led in Los Angeles by the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, and including the UCLA letter-writers—though citing budgetary problems wrought by COVID (Miller 2020). Then, the “same month LAPD ended PredPol, it launched Data-Informed Community-Focused Policing, a new policing framework that embeds data and surveillance into everything LAPD does” (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a). The following year, for its part, PredPol rebranded: no longer selling algorithmic prediction, the firm renamed Geolitica would offer “transparency,

accountability, and effectiveness to public safety teams” (PredPol 2021; see Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a). New name, old process? In fact, “accountability” is an old name and old priority in the policing sphere, as I detail throughout this thesis, though never yet delivering the ethical-political ends sought by the UCLA letter-writers and many others.

There is a further historical fit to “accountability” as what social scientists and other expert knowledge-workers have long purported to provide to public policy in liberal-democratic institutions, as the logic and rhetoric (or veneer) of accounting, scientific objectivity, and data-informed precision (Porter 1992, 2006; Strathern 2000). Explicitly named “accountability” only around halfway (circa 1990) through the multi-decade story I tell, precedents of this mode of accountability as oversight abound in the institutional archive (much of which was written by or with academics or has centered their expertise) I examine and question throughout, in the form of commissions, reports, evaluations, and news coverage. But “accountability” is also what social scientists have been accused of lacking (e.g., Jacobs-Huey 2002), an egalitarian praxis of regard and respect, especially with regard to communities outside the academy who get spoken for and spoken about. Proponents of what might be called Accountability 1 (the organization of institutional knowledge and hierarchy) have often resisted and rebuffed practices of Accountability 2 (the ideal of communal relationality) while incorporating the desire for the second into the prevailing practice of the first.

This thesis aims to measure the means through which advocates for the carceral status quo (“the prevailing oppression”) have been for accountability in one sense and against accountability in another simultaneously. This requires moving beyond a semantic description of *what* “accountability” *means* to a semiotic description of *how people discuss* “accountability” *in ways that implicate broader social realities*. “Unfortunately you cannot resolve a social

contradiction by abolishing the label that has been attached to it” (Hall et al. 1978: vii), the Birmingham School authors of the landmark text *Policing the Crisis* wrote long ago, discussing the pop-criminological discourse around “mugging.” I draw inspiration from that reminder and the critical approach that ensued in examining the troublesome label of “accountability,” drawing out the social contradictions that saturate its contexts of use. For if the binary of Accountabilities 1 and 2 helps highlight the semiotic shiftiness that have surrounded policing in Los Angeles and tied the University to the Police in powerfully contradictory ways, it also surely flattens the political complexity of this situation, wherein many academics have opposed the carceral violence work of their colleagues. Sometimes, as in much of this thesis, such opposition takes the form of locating the oversights (lapses, blindspots) of oversight (accountability). Grappling with questions of representing the violence of policing—which exceeds scenes of physical brutality—I have erred on the side of documentation, a particular logic of accounting that risks reinscription of carceral harm in order to challenge carceral oversights produced through silencing, erasure, or neglect, knowing full well the movement toward abolition neither begins nor ends in writing or recounting. This project is a partial and imperfect effort to examine the grounds of carceral oppression sometimes called apartheid in Los Angeles and track the tricks through which oppression has mostly prevailed but which, if properly understood and collectively countered, may yet be undermined and overcome. It is social movements such as the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition and the Los Angeles Community Action Network [LA CAN] who make and will make abolition (which is also to say *freedom*) into reality, so it is with a view to that work that this work proceeds.

Chapter 1: The University and the Police

after the war the war begins the war goes on

Wanda Coleman (1993), “Notes of a Cultural Terrorist (2)”

August Vollmer left Manila for the San Francisco Bay on August 7, 1899, not long after the American military’s war against the Spanish empire in 1898 had devolved into the American military’s war against Philippine independence (Parker 1961: 34; cf. Agoncillo 1960). In Berkeley, in the East Bay, Vollmer befriended many “university men”; one psychology professor at the University of California encouraged the veteran Vollmer to run for town marshal in 1905 (Parker 1961: 41), a position later converted to “Chief of Police” when the town became a city (Oliver 2016). In 1907, Vollmer established a “school for the special training of police officers,” a necessity in “this progressive age,” with the help of University of California faculty and alumni (Vollmer & Schneider 1917: 878). As Vollmer later recalled, in a report in the new *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* with Berkeley professor of pharmacology Albert Schneider:

For a period of nine years, the police department of Berkeley has given courses of instruction in police methods and procedure, on anthropometry (Bertillon system), finger prints, etc., and from time to time authorities on criminology, on psychiatry, on anthropology and on many other related subjects, have lectured to the department, attendance upon these lectures being a requirement. (Vollmer & Schneider 1917: 879)

A slew of university/police collaborations followed. By 1916, Vollmer had founded a program of Criminology at the University of California, the nation’s first (Oliver 2016)—later institutionalized as a school in 1932, with Vollmer as a professor of police administration. In 1919, Chief Vollmer placed an ad in the university newspaper *The Daily Californian*:

“COLLEGE MEN WANTED FOR POLICE FORCE. INTERESTING EXPERIENCE. LEARN

A NEW PROFESSION. SERVE ON THE BERKELEY POLICE FORCE WHILE YOU GO TO COLLEGE. CONTACT AUGUST VOLLMER, CHIEF OF POLICE” (quoted in Parker 1961: 100). One hundred “college men” applied, fifteen were hired, and the “College Cops” became a sensation in the national press (Oliver 2017). John Larson, a PhD student in physiology and one of the “College Cops,” joined the Berkeley Police Department full-time after finishing his degree and, “under the enthusiastic encouragement of Vollmer,” pioneered the employment of polygraphic “lie detection” technology in U.S. policing (Trovillo 1939: 871; Alder 2007).²⁵ While the innovativeness and efficacy of Larson’s techniques have been called into question, the (quasi-)scientific style they embody has become ubiquitous in police practice and in Vollmer’s legend. Towards the end of Vollmer’s life, a former Vollmer apprentice in Berkeley PD and then Dean of the Berkeley’s Criminology School eulogized: “August Vollmer, police administrator and consultant, student, educator, author, and criminologist, will be recorded in American police history as the man who contributed most to police professionalization by promoting the application of scientific principles to police service” (Wilson 1953: 91).

In the past century, academics have supported police departments in California and beyond through research and technology development, as well as expert opinion, public defense, and other forms of crisis-management (a few sordid cases of which this chapter will discuss), at the same time as many UC students and staff have engaged in bitter struggles against this carceral order of things. The Police have repeatedly been called on in crisis moments for the University, not only but not least to surveil students and staff (most infamously at UCLA, two student Black Panthers assassinated on campus and Professor Angela Y. Davis, fired twice by the

²⁵ As Ken Alder (2007: 24) relates in his history of the U.S. “obsession” with lie detection: “If the old-timers on the force didn’t appreciate the new college cops, they found the doctoral cop unbearable. Larson was running himself ragged: writing a book on his fingerprint system, continuing his lab experiments, auditing courses in criminal psychiatry—all while working the four-to-twelve beat. Vollmer later conceded that the force’s hazing had been particularly cruel. But Larson was not cowed.”

UC Board of Regents for her Communist political affiliations) and beat up and beat back campus protests, e.g., *against* imperial war in southeast Asia, *for* Ethnic Studies programs, *against* higher tuition and fees, or *for* a Cost of Living Adjustment for graduate student-workers.²⁶

For most of the past century, it seems that the Police’s iron fists have fit snugly in the University’s velvet gloves.²⁷ In the University people study and teach; translate, interpret, define; invent things concrete and intangible; become expert. People labor, for more or less pay or none at all. And, at least in an earlier moment, “the majority of campus employees [we]re not paid to think but rather to clean, to type, to file, to shelve, to guard” (Gilmore 1993a: 73), though there are surely digital-era counterparts to typists and filers. All that, however, is often unthought. For although people get classified, sorted, ranked, and pushed out from within, the University mostly purports to *improve*: minds, selves, prospects, worlds. The Police secure(s), order(s), beat(s)—sometimes within the University, but mostly outside it, not least marking and guarding the University’s boundaries. Along with multiculturalizing career opportunities for “private intellectuals” and other “institutional ‘reforms,’” policing may well be another form of “insurance” against reckoning with the charge and the fact that, in Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (1993a: 73) devastatingly incisive language, “the urban university in the US has, historically and

²⁶ The incidents quickly referenced above, among other cases, are as follows: the killing of John Huggins and Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter at UCLA in 1969 and the saga of Angela Y. Davis at UCLA in 1969-1970; a broad antiwar and Third Worldist movement on campuses in that same period (during which time Ohio National Guard troops killed 4 protesting students at Kent State University and Mississippi Highway Patrolmen killed 2 protesting students at Jackson State College, an HBCU); a 1993 hunger strike movement demanding the formation of UCLA’s César E. Chávez Department of Chicana/o Studies; anti-tuition hike protests across the UC system after 2009, including UCPD’s infamous pepper-spraying of Occupy protesters in 2011 at Davis; and the COLA wildcat strikes at UC Santa Cruz. I discuss the late ‘60s-early ‘70s period at UCLA at some length below but have relied widely on histories of campus activism (Umamoto 1989; Pulido 2006; Murch 2010; Ferguson 2017; Davis & Wiener 2020) including some related to COLA wildcat strikes at Santa Cruz (Summers & Gougelet 2020; Evans et al. 2021).

²⁷ *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove* was the classic analysis produced by the Center for Research on Criminal Justice in Berkeley (1975: 11), whose guiding questions included, “How do the present police enforce the oppressive social and personal relations of capitalist society?” Highly critical of the discipline of criminology (Platt & Takagi 1977), many of the authors associated with that research center were forced out of UC Berkeley when administrators moved to close the School of Criminology and refuse to hire back the radicals in other units (Stein 2014).

systematically, underdeveloped the neighborhoods where the working poor live in the shadow of the ever-growing master's house.” (Around UCLA, however, rich and poor are kept much farther apart.) And with the Police securing the University, the University secures what Sylvia Wynter ([1992] 1994) has called “the ‘Truth’ of our present epistemological order.”

This chapter concerns the University and the Police and the order they together have sustained.²⁸ Reading across wide-ranging archives of documentary materials, I specifically analyze three key periods in Los Angeles history. First, I examine the Watts rebellion of 1965 and the Commission formed to assess the uprising's causes. Second, I detail a period of heightened political militancy across the city (including on UCLA's campus) and world in the late 1960s and 1970s and the various “counterinsurgency” efforts engaged to repress it, *war* “at home” and “abroad.” And third, I trace an extended series of LAPD scandals in the 1990s, from the assault of Rodney King in 1991 to the “Rampart scandal,” and their 21st-century aftermaths. In each period, I highlight the conflicting work of academic social scientists in interpreting and framing the social-political situation and the role of the police therein, sometimes covertly or overtly affirming the status quo and sometimes radically challenging it. I assemble these cases and set them side by side to illustrate a core insight of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2017, 2021a) that spectacular instances of the violence of policing—and the proposals for reform and improvement that reliably ensue again and again, as if new—are “not a moment in time” but a routinized “continuation of history.” And “the war goes on” (Coleman 1993).²⁹

²⁸ By University, I do mean to refer to the entire tiered system thought up and helped realized by University of California President Clark Kerr (himself the target of McCarthyist/Reaganist surveillance) in his *The Uses of the University* (1963), though I focus here on the UC with which “university” is *not* synonymous. If Police most evokes uniformed police departments such as LAPD, I mean also to point to *policing* across scales (municipal, county, state, federal), nations, and forms (including military and intelligence). Among many, one key inspiration and resource methodologically is the work of David H. Price (2004, 2008, 2016).

²⁹ For the great Los Angeles poet Wanda Coleman (1993), “war” was not only the clash of the police and the riot but also resistance against other social violence: “the war to feed children the war to clothe their backs / the war to meet the rent the war to keep the gas tank full the / war to end the calculated madness keeping the poor poor.”

i. Misreading Watts, 1965

On the night of August 11, 1965, near the predominantly Black neighborhood of Watts in south L.A., a white California Highway Patrol officer pulled over Marquette Frye for suspected drunk driving. Tempers flared, and another officer struck Frye with a baton (Horne 1995). Word of the violence soon spread through the summer night, and a crowd formed. Confrontation between police and the crowd intensified, igniting a week of fiery unrest, characterized by Robert L. Allen (1969: 27-28) in *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* as “almost entirely spontaneous [...] attacks and looting directed against the property of white merchants who exploit the black community.” Eventually, California’s Lieutenant Governor ordered more than 13,000 members of the California National Guard to assist some 2,000 LAPD officers and sheriff’s deputies in “pacifying” this segregated district of Los Angeles. At the height of the fires, a curfew was imposed on 46.5 square miles of South L.A. Tanks were deployed around the city, including to guard the southern perimeter of the University of Southern California’s campus and its Romanesque Revival architecture (Davis & Wiener 2020: 22). By the week’s end, police had made almost 4,000 arrests. More than 1,000 people were injured and 34 were dead, including 23 killed by LAPD officers and National Guardsmen (Queally 2015).

In the weeks, months, and years that followed, the influence of Watts residents’s explosive uprising could be felt in a wave of similar rebellions in cities and towns across the country and in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s being prompted to reconsider priorities, tactics, and political theories in what were to be the final years of his life (Franklin 2015). Indeed, transpiring only a week after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Watts uprising has come to mark for many historians a pivotal transition in Black political culture in the U.S., the eclipsing of civil rights activism by emergent Black Power movements (Kelley 2015). The Watts rebellion

also represented a clear crisis for policing and the U.S.'s apartheid social order (Davis 1990; Gilmore 1993a, 1993b; Felker-Kantor 2018). Universities and academics in Los Angeles were among those called upon to help restore institutional legitimacy.

On August 24, 1965, the Governor of California established a commission to “make an objective and dispassionate study of the Los Angeles riots” (Governor’s Commission on the Los Angeles Riots 1965: i-iii), to provide an account of what happened and why. The Governor selected John A. McCone, previously director of the CIA, as chair of the Commission with seven other members, including the president of Loyola University and the dean of UCLA’s School of Medicine as well as a judge and a Presbyterian minister, the panel’s two Black representatives. Over the next three months the McCone Commission (as it came to be called), its staff, and a team of research consultants from area law firms and universities (UCLA, USC, and Cal State Los Angeles) conducted hundreds of interviews, wide-reaching surveys, and thorough analysis before the Commission delivered its final report, *Violence in the City—An End or a Beginning?* on December 2, 1965. Framed with respectable authority, social-scientific standards, and a certain sympathy for all those implicated in the uprising (civilian and police, “looter” and business-owner, Black and white and Mexican-American), the McCone Commission diagnosed “a sickness in the center of our cities,” a “dull, devastating spiral of failure” faced by “disadvantaged” youth (2-7). Whose failure? The report waffled between claiming that “all segments of society” bear a responsibility for providing opportunities of education and employment to the “disadvantaged” and suggesting that Black people were the ultimate source of their own problems and the “August nightmare” (6-9). The Commission seemed to imply that many Black migrants fleeing the Jim Crow south had come to Los Angeles with improbable fantasies: “To those who have come with high hopes and great expectations and see the success

of others so close at hand, failure brings a special measure of frustration and disillusionment” (4). The report further insinuated that these illusions (of grandeur) prevented some Black people from appreciating that the “opportunity to succeed is probably unequalled in any other major American city” (3-4).³⁰ “While the Negro districts of Los Angeles are not urban gems,” the Commission wrote, “neither are they slums.”

The McCone Commission thus portrayed the Watts rioters as a small, disenchanting, and ultimately “violent fraction” of L.A.’s Black population, at odds with the vast majority of the community (Governor’s Commission 1965: 1). With this “riffraff theory” of the uprising, the McCone Commission “completely misunderstood the character and implications of the Los Angeles riots,” argued Robert M. Fogelson (1967: 340-342), a radical historian and early critic of the Commission’s report. Through extensive surveys of Angelenos in the months following the riots, Fogelson and a team of researchers at UCLA’s Institute of Government and Public Affairs (the “Los Angeles Riot Study”) independently determined that the McCone Commission drastically understated Black peoples’ participation in and support for the Watts uprising (Fogelson 1967: 346; Greenwood 1967). A team of UCLA psychologists (Sears & Tomlinson 1968) further described how certain myths about urban uprisings had become widely accepted in public discourse during the mid-’60s: first, that riots were “participated in and viewed favorably by only a tiny segment of the Negro community,” especially such “fringe groups as Communists, hoodlums, and Black Muslims”—the “riffraff”; second, that “most Negroes [saw] the riots as purposeless, meaningless, senseless outbursts of criminality”; and third, that Black people viewed riots as purely harmful, with no positive contribution to struggles for social and

³⁰ The most legitimate grievance against L.A. in particular, the Commission acknowledged, might concern the “least adequate network of public transportation in any major city in America” (81-82). For their part, on August 20, 1965, the editors of USC’s student newspaper *The Daily Trojan* suggested the need “to limit the influx into California on only the type of people who are in need of welfare,” whose envy and anger at society’s “haves” caused the recent “hell in the City of Angels” (Editorial 1965; Horne 1995: 234).

economic justice. These ideas pervaded the McCone Commission's report but were, these critics insisted, inaccurate representations of the facts and of Black Angelenos' actual opinions. Instead, survey data indicated that as many as 15% of Black adults in the Watts area actively participated in the uprising (far more than the 2% claimed by the McCone Commission) and an additional 20% expressly "approved of the rioting" (Sears & Tomlinson 1968: 502). What's more, "many who disapproved of the rioting gave as their reason the fact that Negroes, not whites, suffered the brunt of the casualties—the personal injuries as opposed to the property losses" (Fogelson 1967: 346). In general, Black respondents focused criticisms against government authorities and offered defenses of those involved in the uprising (Sears & Tomlinson 1968: 502). Most importantly, the Los Angeles Riot Study confirmed that "the violent acts were expressions of genuine grievances and, as such, meaningful protests," entirely contrary to the McCone Commission's report (Fogelson 1967: 347).

Why did the McCone Commission, with its own team of lawyers, surveyors, and academic researchers, so starkly "misread"—to quote a *Los Angeles Times* headline (Greenwood 1967)—the causes and significance of the Watts uprising? Since the Commission was primarily "representative of upper-middle-class whites in Los Angeles," Fogelson (1967: 342) reasoned, perhaps the commissioners' own "preconceptions about violence, law enforcement, ghettos, and slums....prevented [them] from perceptively analyzing the evidence and correctly interpreting the riots." The Black leadership class also may have had its own preconceptions more or less at odds with the truth of the rioting Black "masses," who were also, in the words of Robert L. Allen (1969: 28), "calling for new leadership willing to confront head-on the problems arising from oppression and powerlessness." Whatever their origin, these preconceptions and misconceptions

served a valuable function: the McCone Commission obscured the political dimensions of the Watts uprising, particularly the politics of policing.

The McCone Commission's report, UCLA political scientist Harry M. Scoble (1966: 176) argued, "goes to some length to dismiss the charges of police brutality or police harassment," charges voiced loudly and repeatedly by Black people in Watts and across Los Angeles. As the Commission's (1965: 27) report had acknowledged, "One witness after another has recounted instances in which, in their opinion, the police have used excessive force or have been disrespectful and abusive in their language or manner," for years leading up to 1965. More than seventy claims of police brutality occurring during the uprising were brought in front of the Commission, but the commissioners treated these claims as evidence only of "the depths of the feelings of a segment of the Negro community toward the Police Department" (27), not as any evidence of the depths of institutionalized racism and violence in policing.³¹ The report made no mention of the LAPD's notorious 1962 raid of the Nation of Islam Mosque in Los Angeles—during which officers had shot seven unarmed Black Muslims, killing one, Ronald Stokes (Knight 1994)—or any other police controversy, effectively excluding these as potential causes for anger and rebellion in Watts (Scoble 1966). And rather than investigating these new allegations of police brutality, the McCone Commission (1965: 27) simply referred the cases to the "appropriate and responsible agencies"—that is, to the LAPD and L.A. Board of Police Commissioners, "the very agencies being complained about," Scoble noted (1966: 175-176).

One of the Commission's primary stated goals was to find ways to restore public respect toward "police authority," without which law enforcement would be "rendered impotent" and

³¹ In 1967, Kwame Ture (then known as Stokely Carmichael) and Charles V. Hamilton would define the concept *institutional racism* to make sense of how "the black community has been the creation of, and dominated by, a combination of oppressive forces and special interests in the white community...Institutional racism has been maintained deliberately by the power structure and through indifference, inertia and lack courage on the part of white masses as well as petty officials. Whenever black demands for change become loud and strong, indifference is replaced by active opposition based on fear and self-interest" (Ture & Hamilton [1967] 1992: 22).

“[c]haos might easily result” (Governor’s Commission 1965: 29). To do so, the report superficially acknowledged that Black people “distrusted” police while otherwise dismissing any reasons for this distrust (namely, experiences of police violence and harassment) as unfounded and illegitimate (28). In Harry Scoble’s (1966: 176) view, the Commission found “a sophisticated way of saying what, later, Mayor [Sam] Yorty characteristically expressed far more bluntly: police brutality, he said, was an issue in ‘a world-wide subversive campaign...[led by] Communists, dupes, and demagogues.’” “Subversion” was a long-term fixation of Mayor Yorty’s; in 1940, as a member of the California Assembly, he had chaired the state’s first proto-McCarthyist investigating committee. And claims of subversion were not just expressions of Cold War paranoia. Such claims activated the resources of the state and often the (raced and classed) support of society at large, turning the governance of civil disobedience and unrest into a problem of national security.³²

Without making claims about outside provocateurs inciting the Watts riots, the McCone Commission effectively elicited a similar result. In the Commission’s report, police brutality was not a problem of police behavior but of Black people’s “feelings.” Only the word of police officials was taken at face value;³³ Scoble (1966: 180) called this the “the propagation of the Chief Parker-LAPD point of view.” The testimony of ordinary Black people was treated as expressing only feelings and, hence, neither factual nor accurate—but instead, implicitly, vulnerable to manipulation by ideological agitators and the criminal element. Still, the Commission thought these attitudes could be better understood and eventually changed, thereby

³² On the policing of “subversion” in the Cold War U.S. and beyond, see the work of David H. Price (2004), Bob Blauner (2009), Seth Rosenfeld (2013), and Charisse Burden-Stelly (2017), among others.

³³ Jurisprudential scholarship on how the U.S. judiciary came to presume police expertise and honesty (Lvovsky 2017; Dunkle 2021) surfaces in Ch. 2.

fixing the bad feelings of Black Angelenos toward the police and the bad reputation of the police among Black Angelenos:

Basically, on the one hand, we call for a better understanding by the law enforcement agencies of Negro community attitudes and, on the other hand, a more widespread understanding within the Negro community of the value of the police and the extent to which the law enforcement agencies provide it with security. (Governor's Commission 1965: 29)

If anything, the police needed to put "greater effort" in "community relations" (34-36); the Commission also recommended hiring more Black and Mexican-American officers.

By downplaying Black participation in the Watts riots (whether via empirical errors or intentional distortion), portraying rioting as the action of a "riffraff" minority, and treating complaints about police behavior as a problem of Black Angelenos' perceptions and attitudes, the McCone Commission tried to eliminate any impression that policing was a form of domination that Black people might object to and rebel against. The riots had been a "manifesto" from the streets of Watts, civil rights movement organizer Bayard Rustin (1966: 29-30) had recognized, noting further that rioters "made a point of looting and destroying stores that were notorious for their high prices and hostile manners," sparing other white-owned businesses. But the McCone Commission treated the week's events as only a vivid display of criminality. An uprising (however short-lived) of an oppressed group against institutions that exploited, harassed, and persecuted them became, in the Commission's analysis, a brute response to psychological and socioeconomic "failures." And these failures could be relieved by reforms to education and jobs programs, as well as by new police messaging and hiring strategies. Although proclaiming that the challenge of improving "the conditions of Negro life" would require dramatic, even unprecedented changes in "all segments of society," the McCone Commission

(1965: 6-9) mostly worked to limit the scope of the problem and, especially, shield police from challenges to their authority.

In the McCone Commission's report, there is only one note of dissent. One panel-member, the Black Presbyterian minister Reverend James E. Jones, exclaimed in comments added to the end of the report, "I do not believe it is the function of this Commission to put a lid on protest registered by those sweltering in ghettos of the urban areas of our country" (Governor's Commission 1965: 88). Jones's comments suggest that the rest of the Commission proceeded as though the neutralization of protest was precisely their goal. The McCone Commission represents how liberals married concern for remedying social problems like poverty, poor education, and unemployment with an even greater concern for maintaining "law and order." Indeed, President Lyndon B. Johnson—much like Mayor Yorty—compared Watts rebels to members of the Ku Klux Klan, considering both extremists and "law-breakers" (Murakawa 2014: 78). The McCone Commission is an important document of the sociopolitical shift in which Johnson's "War on Poverty," declared earlier in 1964, evolved into a "War on Crime" that continues to this day (Hinton 2016).

Harry Scoble (1966: 170, 179-180) argued that the McCone Commission and other public task forces serve as a kind of ritual in modern societies, providing an opportunity for governing institutions to transmit information and particular viewpoints ("propaganda") to the public at large, as well as a "cathartic" opportunity for marginalized people to express their grievances to the ruling class (in a "socially harmless" way) and feel better by doing so. After a crisis, Scoble contended, the Public Commission ritual could help "provide the least substantive accommodation deemed necessary and therefore...preserve as nearly as possible the existing distribution of power" (180). Scoble, a professor at UCLA, found it troubling that so many of his

academic colleagues would participate in such a ritual, lending the credibility of scientific research standards to an end-product he understood to be riddled with errors and distortions and a “demonstrated lack of either old or new social science findings.” Reflecting upon the McCone Commission raised for him “central questions of whether social scientists are being used as legitimizers of the status quo in politics. If they are, are they aware of it?” (Scoble 1966: 180).

“And,” Scoble (1966: 180) asked further, “what are the private exchange values [social scientists] derive from association with a special commission of this kind?” Holding this private and individualized question to the side, the values derived from legitimation work by the University *qua* institution are clearer in the historical record. In February 1967, a report called *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society* was issued by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice (chaired by Nicholas Katzenbach), which Lyndon B. Johnson had established in July 1965, the month before the Watts uprising. More openly than the McCone Commission, the Katzenbach Commission admitted that “injustices” do exist in the criminal justice system and affirmed that these should be eliminated alongside efforts toward reducing crime and “strengthening” law enforcement (President’s Commission 1967: vi). The report further acknowledged that “minority-group residents have grievances not just against society as a whole, but specifically against the police” and also that police officers sometimes engage in “obviously and totally reprehensible” behavior, including discriminatory enforcement of laws, harassment, and physical abuse (99,102).

Among 200 recommendations for changes in police departments, courts, prisons, and other domains of society, the Katzenbach Commission insisted that “the system of criminal justice must attract more people and better people...with more knowledge, expertise, initiative, and integrity,” as well as more “minority-group officers” (v-vi). Concretely, the Commission

“strongly” believed that all police chiefs, supervisors, and administrators and then, eventually, all “police personnel with general enforcement powers” should be required to have bachelor’s degrees from universities (109-110). In this way, universities were enlisted in the War on Crime to help “professionalize” policing (Murakawa 2014; Hinton 2016), both by educating personnel to higher standards and by conducting research to “help bring scientific knowledge and techniques to bear on the problems of criminal justice” (President’s Commission 1967: 245, 276). And the emphasis on education and research went hand-in-hand with the most important dimension of professionalization: money. The Katzenbach Commission stressed that police and other carceral institutions “require substantially more money if they are to control crime better,” including to pay more highly-educated staff and to fund the development of new “knowledge and techniques” (x). States and the federal government, the Commission insisted, should “finance the multitude of improvements” that policing agencies needed—and that universities, as hubs of “innovation and reform,” would be essential in helping provide (281).

Money came in droves, with the passage of the 1968 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act and establishment of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), bringing the Katzenbach Commission’s vision into reality (Murakawa 2014: 73; Hinton 2016). Along with “massive outlays” of funding for research into criminal behavior, the effectiveness of policing tactics, and technological development, the LEAA funded the Law Enforcement Education Program (LEEP), which provided loans and grants “to encourage young men and women to pursue a college education and subsequently criminal justice careers” (Law Enforcement Assistance Administration 1970: 53; Stauffenberg 1977: 681; Hornbostel 2022). Colleges and universities transformed themselves to accommodate this new source of students and money; between 1967 and 1974, the number of colleges offering “police-related programs”

swelled from 184 to 1,030 (Stauffenberg 1977: 683). By far the greatest expenditures of the LEAA were block grants for police departments to purchase “helicopters, patrol cars, infrared cameras, riot gear,” and whatever other assets and materials chiefs saw fit (Murakawa 2014: 73). Funding for police education and research was not coincidental but, rather, deeply connected to funding for police weapons and infrastructure. If “it’s fair to say in the ‘60s, police in America were in a somewhat primitive state, there was limited training, a lack of education, a lack of diversity,” as one staffer on the Katzenbach Commission and future law professor later told *NPR* (Corley 2017), university collaboration in the late 1960s helped make police forces seem like legitimate, modern institutions deserving of massive investment. Without the participation of individual academics on public commissions and the participation of academic institutions in projects of innovation and improvement, U.S. policing might have continued to seem more and more unprofessional, imprecise, and ultimately untrustworthy. Instead, many faculty tried to help police departments solve their reputation crisis, even as many others inside the University continued to clash with the Police.

ii. Counterinsurgencies, 1969–1970

In the years following the Watts Rebellion, Black Power movements converged with ascendant anti-war, Chicano, and Asian-American activism to turn Los Angeles’s college and university campuses themselves into central battlegrounds between radical organizing and the repressive forces of the police state (Pulido 2006; Ferguson 2017; Davis & Wiener 2020). Even when specific university programs worked to recruit and support more students of color at what had been institutions with predominantly white student bodies and white faculties (by design), police forces at the local and national levels frequently targeted the newly recruited students and

staff of color as “subversive” (Escobar 1993; Murch 2010). LAPD and the FBI’s infamous Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) both ran surveillance operations on and around California universities, specifically targeting Black and Chicano student organizers.³⁴ Later lawsuits revealed that LAPD officers “infiltrated” the Chicano student organization at Valley State (now CSU Northridge) and also “enrolled in Chicano studies courses there to monitor faculty members’ lectures” for “subversive” content (Escobar 1993: 1512).³⁵ Surveillance and counterintelligence operations contributed to the killing of Black Panther Party leaders Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter and John Huggins on UCLA’s campus in January 1969. If the FBI did not directly plan any assassination, as has sometimes been alleged (Newton 1980), what is clear and incontrovertible is that COINTELPRO actively and successfully spread lies and stoked division and hostility between the Panthers and the Black nationalist US Organization (Shetty 2019; Davis & Wiener 2020: 445-447), a pattern repeated elsewhere across the country.³⁶

Some university officials collaborated with these forms of surveillance, just as others resisted and were subjected to them. In March 1969, Angela Y. Davis was hired as a professor at UCLA, the first Black woman to join the Philosophy Department (Shoop 2019). After a covert FBI operative monitoring campus activism sent a letter alleging Davis was a communist to *The Daily Bruin*, UCLA’s student newspaper, she was fired by the University of California’s Board of Regents, which invoked a 1949 rule requiring UC employees to swear they were not

³⁴ On COINTELPRO and its precursors and afterlives in the surveillance of Black people and movements more broadly, see work by Simone Browne (2015) and Megan Ming Francis (2016), e.g.

³⁵ For more on the powerful history of Chicano/Chicana activism in Los Angeles, including the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (MEChA), see work by Lorena Oropeza (2005) and Mario T. García (2015).

³⁶ Later that year, four days after the FBI’s assassination of Fred Hampton in Chicago, the LAPD’s new Special Weapons and Tactics team, or SWAT, would make its first major mission in an infamous raid that destroyed the Black Panther Party’s L.A. headquarters and injured a dozen members.

communists.³⁷ Davis was a member of the U.S. Communist Party and proudly proclaimed as much, refusing to participate in or bow to the UC's proto-McCarthyist loyalty oath (Blauner 2009). While legal appeals against her firing were pending in court, Davis was allowed to teach as planned but put under strict (secret and not-so-secret) surveillance from FBI and university administrators; she also faced intense forms of harassment and abuse, including persistent threats on her life, from "racists and anti-Communists throughout the state," as she later recalled (Davis 1974: 219). As Davis said in an October 1969 speech at a Berkeley rally, the UC's Regents and the broader ruling class "intend to keep the knowledge developed in the university in the service of the prevailing oppression" (quoted in American Association of University Professors 1971: 471). Though a judge soon overruled the firing decision and declared the UC Regents' actions as unconstitutional, UC and UCLA administrators persisted in surveilling Davis's lectures, speeches, and activities for evidence of "indoctrinating" students or allowing her "extra-University commitments and activities [to] interfere with her duties as a member of the faculty" (quoted in American Association of University Professors 1971: 405). Finding no such evidence, the "secret committee" of UCLA faculty tasked with the investigation recommended that no special action be taken, and UCLA's Chancellor agreed that Davis should be duly reappointed for the following year. In immediate response, the UC Regents stripped the UCLA Chancellor or the UCLA Philosophy Department of the ability to hire or fire Davis at all. When the surveillance committee did not produce Governor Ronald Reagan and his UC Regents' desired outcome of incriminating and terminating Davis, the Regents intervened to do it themselves (American Association of University Professors 1971). 1,673 UCLA faculty voted

³⁷ Mike Davis and Jon Wiener (2020: 474) note that the UC Regents was "a stacked deck of Reagan appointees," after the election of Governor Ronald Reagan, who had vilified campus activism en route to electoral victory and who subsequently set out to authorize greater police powers and raise tuition and fees (Rosenfeld 2013; Marez 2016).

for a resolution to denounce the Regents' action and reinstate Davis, and another legal appeal might have succeeded, but the UCLA controversy was resolved (or displaced) when Davis was wanted then arrested and imprisoned for connections to an attempted jailbreak at the Marin County Civic Center that resulted in the deaths of Jonathan P. Jackson, a judge, and two others (Davis 1974). Suffice it to say that all the campus organizing and protest—especially among students from marginalized groups formerly unwelcome at UCLA and still vulnerable to repression and violence there—as well as the controversies surrounding the hiring and firings of Angela Davis contributed to an intensely politicized atmosphere.

During the same academic year (1969–1970) as the Davis Affair was developing, U.S. college students led the most intense and widespread protests against the U.S.'s imperial wars in Southeast Asia, particularly in May 1970 when President Richard Nixon announced that 30,000 U.S. troops in Vietnam would be deployed to invade Cambodia. As Mike Davis and Jon Wiener (2020: 554-556) would recount, what followed was “the largest student protest in American history,” involving around 4 million students across 450 campuses; at UCLA, “several thousand students, including members of its national champion basketball team, attempted to shut down the campus” on May 5. UCLA's campus police called for reinforcements from the LAPD, whose Chief Edward M. Davis, “an avid supporter of Governor Reagan's zero-tolerance policy toward campus protest, sent in more than 500 of his troops to take back UCLA from the anti-war movement,” the first time such a large contingent of LAPD officers had ever been called onto UCLA's campus (Davis & Wiener 2020: 555, 615). LAPD arrived with brutal force. Twelve UCLA students were hospitalized due to injuries dealt by police, in the same wave of state violence in which National Guard troops killed four student protesters at Kent State in Ohio and

Mississippi Highway Patrolmen killed 2 student protesters at Jackson State, a historically Black college in Jackson.

Much like the McCone Commission after the Watts rebellion, UCLA's Chancellor tasked a Commission with investigating the day's events (Chancellor's Commission 1970; Cohen 1970). While the May 5th anti-war protests had mostly taken place outside on UCLA's lower campus grounds, LAPD officers arriving on the scene stormed two buildings, one of which, Campbell Hall (where the two Black Panthers, John Huggins and Bunchy Carter, had been assassinated one year earlier), was nowhere near the main demonstrations but was the campus hub for "minority academic, student support, and student organization offices" (Escobar 1993: 1500). As later reported by the Chancellor's Commission (1970: 38-39), "Many members of the minority groups and others, as well, became convinced that the police 'invaded' this building precisely because it housed the ethnic programs, in other words, that the tensions between the minorities, especially the Blacks and Chicanos, and the LAPD in the Los Angeles community at large found expression on the UCLA campus on May 5 in this attack." Ernest G. Gutierrez, a Chicano staff member in UCLA's High Potential Program (which, because it served racialized students, was surveilled on an ongoing basis by COINTELPRO and LAPD [Escobar 1993]) at Campbell Hall, recounted to the Chancellor's Commission (1970: 39) how "a policeman without warning struck him in the chest and the side of the face," then "hit and kicked him while he was down." The Commission's report also relates the LAPD's shooting of Arch Henry White, a Shawnee-Kickapoo student, who was found by other students "on the floor in a pool of blood with the officer standing over him" (40-41). Although the Commission mostly recounted the story from the LAPD officer's version of events, and they admitted as much, a picture emerges of Arch Henry White's resistance against the kind of beating dealt to Gutierrez and others at

Campbell Hall becoming a criminal (and killable) offense. Arch Henry White lived—he managed to deflect the officer’s bullet, which grazed his face rather than striking him—but despite needing 20 stitches for his injuries, he (not the officer) “was arrested and was charged with assaulting a police officer with a deadly weapon” (41). Overall, the Chancellor’s Commission concluded that it was the LAPD who “created violence” on UCLA’s upper campus that day, as officers “physically attacked many innocent persons, inflicting many injuries,” and “arrested many people for no sensible reason”—a “pattern of attack and arrest [that] was discriminatory” (56).³⁸ Yet, even this relatively sympathetic Commission’s report was marred by racially discriminatory and deprecating patterns of thought and explanation. Two members of the Chancellor’s Commission, Henry Espinoza and Everett Wells, were compelled to clarify in an addendum to the report that they rejected the report’s bizarre implication (“conscious racism”) that Chicanos were mobilized against the university administration because of the Cinco de Mayo holiday. “Not so,” Espinoza and Wells wrote, this mobilization would have happened any day, given the incendiary circumstances (Chancellor’s Commission 1970: 57).³⁹

One other, extraordinary dimension of the political contestations at UCLA during 1969 and 1970 concerns the institutional and epistemological relationships of social scientists (anthropologists, in particular) with the U.S. imperial-carceral-industrial complex. One version of the story, as recounted by anthropologist Richard Borshay Lee (2015), begins at a

³⁸ The Chancellor’s Commission (1970: 46) also reported that “The Los Angeles Police Department has for some time conducted undercover operations at UCLA.” One undercover officer, Sergeant Ted Kozak, had enrolled in 1969 as a History major and “became an active member of several small radical student organizations,” spying on both faculty and students. In February 1970, during demonstrations in Westwood, Kozak had been arrested with other protesters, but unlike them, charges against him were dropped. Through their lawyers, the other student demonstrators discovered that Sgt. T. Kozak of the LAPD Intelligence Division could be called as a witness against them. The Chancellor’s Commission further noted at least two more undercover LAPD agents involved in those protests. The complete history of LAPD surveillance, infiltration, and counterinsurgency efforts during this period has yet to be written (but see Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2022c).

³⁹ Edward Escobar (1993) has further detailed how, among others, “UCLA Chicanos saw the attack [in Campbell Hall] as a deliberate attempt to intimidate and stifle the Chicano movement on campus.”

demonstration in early 1970 during which students occupied a UCLA campus building, perhaps Haines Hall. There, protesters with the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam discovered evidence that UCLA professors and other academics around the country (at least a “dozen major universities”) were engaged in research funded by the U.S. Department of Defense and contributing to “counterinsurgency” policing efforts in the Kingdom of Thailand (Myers 1970: 4). Michael Moerman, the anthropology professor at the center of what would unfold into scandal, later wrote that a graduate student who had worked as an assistant and typist for him had “stolen” and leaked the files: “no difficult task since the papers were all personal, and not ‘secret’ in any official sense and since the University cabinet in which they were stored has no lock” (quoted in Price 2016: 332). For its part, the Student Mobilization Committee remained tight-lipped on the exposed papers’ provenance, focusing instead on their implications:

The Student Mobilization Committee has come into possession of a number of documents which show a widespread manipulation of American universities and scholars for purposes of counterinsurgency research by a number of government agencies and private ‘think tanks’ under government contract.

This manipulation is taking place behind the backs of the students and most of the faculty and even behind the backs of some of the scientists whose work is being sponsored and/or used by counterinsurgency agencies in an indirect way.

These documents lift a corner of the curtain behind which is hidden a widespread abuse of the American academic community under the general counterrevolutionary policy of the government. And it is not only foreign policy, for these documents show the agencies involved consider the findings to be applicable to domestic problems within the U.S. (Student Mobilization Committee 1970: 3).

Eric Wolf and Joseph Jorgensen—then professors of anthropology at the University of Michigan and members of the American Anthropological Association’s Ethics Committee—received Xerox copies of some of these documents from the Student Mobilization Committee and subsequently published a landmark article about the findings in *The New York Review of Books*,

entitled “Anthropology on the Warpath in Thailand” (Jorgensen & Wolf 1970).⁴⁰ There was “a surprising ambiguity” within these documents, they wrote, as to whether U.S. government agents of especially the Agency for International Development (US AID) and the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (variously ARPA or DARPA) were “soliciting social scientists” to participate in international intelligence-gathering or, in some cases, social scientists were soliciting these government agencies to ply their trade (Jorgensen and Wolf 1970). While Jorgensen and Wolf (1970) reported that it was widely understood that “most social scientists do not want to work for the government” (after scandals about militarized research collaborations had already rocked the academy, see below)—and that this fact “dismayed” some participants assembled at a Massachusetts think tank in 1967 to discuss and plan Thai research—some social scientists evidently *did* want to work for and with the government at war. This included social scientists at UCLA, who were contracted in 1969 through an agreement of the UC Regents with the American Advisory Council for Thailand [AACT], a consultancy under the auspices of US AID in all but name. *The Student Mobilizer* quoted the UC Regents/AACT–AID contract at length, noting that the university was engaged, among other purposes, to:

“identify research that is being has been, or will be conducted in universities, foundations and other institutions that may relate to the developmental and counterinsurgency activities in Thailand; evaluate, index and make such research available to AID; suggest and solicit research proposals relevant to AID activity in Thailand for consideration by AID/W” (the W stands for Washington) “and USOM/Thailand,” (USOM is United States Operation Mission, a subdivision of AID.” (contract quoted in Myers 1970: 4, quotation marks and parentheticals in original)

⁴⁰ They detail further: “The documents we had received were not classified in the legal sense, but they were copied from personal files of an anthropologist at a university in California. That is to say, we were presented with Xerox copies of the originals. We regret this action, and would certainly not have taken it ourselves, nor would we have encouraged anyone else to do so. But the documents seemed to us of such significance that, while taking care to protect the names of those mentioned, we none the less felt compelled to pursue the questions raised by them because of our concern for the integrity of our profession” (Jorgensen & Wolf 1970).

These administrative functions were intended to organize and interpret in-country, on-the-ground work of collecting “raw data” about political life in rural Thailand, where the US and the Thai Kingdom’s concerns about communist revolutionary activity were concentrated. AACT’s top priority was “[s]trengthening civil security at the village level: principally through aid to the Thai national police department” (AACT meeting minutes, January 24-25, 1969, quoted in Jorgensen & Wolf 1970). In the generation of government-sponsored research as World War II experiments metastasized into Cold War prerogatives (cf. Price 2008, 2016), anthropologists were “supposed to bring in the ‘behavioral’ information; others would use that information to formulate and execute public policy” (Jorgensen & Wolf 1970).

Why the revelation of the Thailand counterinsurgency research was at all “surprising” and especially controversial was because a previous U.S. government/university research program for counterinsurgency in Latin America, known as “Project Camelot,” had already been notoriously exposed, widely condemned, and supposedly abandoned in 1965 (Reivich [1967] 2007; Jorgensen & Wolf 1970; Rohde 2013; Price 2016). The new revelation in 1970 indicated that U.S. government agencies continued to lead counterinsurgency collaborations in countries around the world—with the willing and/or unaware participation of university-based social scientists—even when claiming not to. Fuller histories of these international policing projects have now been written (Simpson 2008; Price 2016; Schrader 2019), but it was apparent even at the time that some U.S. academics were willing partners in Cold War surveillance and suppression efforts, “at home” or “abroad.” Indeed, more than one exposed proposal for anticommunist surveillance research in Thailand touted the “*potential applicability of the findings in the United States*” (quoted in Jorgensen & Wolf 1970)—though perhaps, in that generic hazard of the research proposal, such potential may have been exaggerated. Indeed, more

than *The Student Mobilizer* activists, Jorgensen and Wolf (1970) conveyed the potential signs of disconnect, unrealized, and failure pervading the dossier of US/Thai activities. More than total knowledge and insight into foreign peoples and their political movement, what anthropologists and other social scientists may have most offered AACT, AID, ARPA, and the like was the *legitimization* of war efforts afforded by expertise and especially by scientific “objectivity,” in their 20th-century guises (Jorgensen & Wolf 1970; Solovey 2013; Price 2016: 326).

In all, wrote Jorgensen and Wolf (1970), the Thai documents substantiate “a curious and chilling perspective on the uses of social science” as part of counterinsurgency efforts to “creat[e] compliance through coercion,” the plain truth behind catchier slogans of *winning hearts and minds*. Counterinsurgency was a term popularized by the presidential administration of John F. Kennedy in the early ‘60s, naming an older set of policing strategies and techniques, combining surveillance, racialization, violence, and psychological manipulation attempting to make target populations accept carceral control as for the community’s benefit (Khalili 2010; Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2019a, 2022c; Rodríguez 2020b). Like other empires, the U.S. has explicitly deployed counterinsurgency methods in attempts to prevent and suppress anticolonial, anticapitalist, and communist political possibilities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as in U.S. cities (Westad 2006; Prashad 2020). From the 19th century through to the 21st century, “foreign” and “domestic” projects of counterinsurgency policing have been profoundly intertwined. As Stuart Schrader (2019: 25) has summed up, “Across the globe, counterinsurgency was policing,” just as in the U.S., “policing was counterinsurgency.”⁴¹ Events at the University of California, Los Angeles in the years 1969 and 1970 substantiate such an

⁴¹ Different policing techniques and practitioners circulated along specific routes, and Schrader (2019: 232) convincingly shows how, for instance, aggressive SWAT-style policing developed in Los Angeles before then spreading to Cold War battlegrounds on the “imperial periphery,” rather than “boomerang”-ing from foreign sites to domestic ones.

argument and spotlight the university as a key site in the development, legitimization, and deployment of counterinsurgency tactics, techniques, and programs.

In the “Anthropology on the Warpath in Thailand” scandal, to be sure, it was Wolf and Jorgensen and other whistleblowers who faced the most severe censure (as “reprehensible” for making highly-public accusations against colleagues without due process) from the American Anthropological Association’s Ad Hoc Committee to Evaluate the Controversy Concerning Anthropological Activities in Thailand, chaired by Margaret Mead. Finding none of the US anthropologists in Thailand to have violated disciplinary norms about applied or “mission-oriented” research—norms which would have prohibited only “clandestine” forms—the committee’s report further reasoned that such research was “counterinsurgent only for present funding purposes; a decade ago it might have been [intended for] ‘mental health’” (quoted in Price 2016: 336-338). This analysis is striking, holding up fund-seeking researchers’ strategic deployment of an institutionally valorized buzzword to absolve those researchers from critique of political intent or consequence.⁴² Instead, the AAA committee explicitly insisted that the Thai research was *not* “sinister” (Price 2016: 337). Wolf and Jorgensen offered an impassioned rejoined at a 1971 meeting of the AAA council: “appalled by the degree to which the committee tries to disguise human and cultural realities through the use of an Orwellian language which turns phenomena into their very opposites. We are as much dismayed by the callousness of the report as by its factual and theoretical faults” (quoted in Price 2016: 339). A growing radical caucus within anthropology—at that time organizing under the name Anthropologists for Radical Political Action, an ironic inversion of that other ARPA, the Defense

⁴² The “strategically deployable shifter” (Urciuoli 2008) and other pragmatic and metapragmatic linguistic practices—signal concerns of semiotic anthropology—will be discussed at great length in Ch. 2.

Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency—moved to reject the ad hoc committee's report and won the floor votes by decisive margins (Lee 2015; Price 2016).

The devolution of the Thailand exposé-scandal to debates of and about language recalls the misreading of Watts and anticipates the way counterinsurgency's expanded domestic career would later in the 20th century be disguised through new language games, with the assistance of new generations of academics and against the challenge of others.⁴³

iii. Scandals, Cultures, Statistics, 1991–

Not long after midnight on March 3, 1991, in the foothills of the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles, a white husband-and-wife pair of California Highway Patrol officers attempted to pull over Rodney King for driving too fast on the I-210 freeway. King, already on parole and having been drinking alcohol that night, did not stop his car (Cannon 1997). A high-speed chase ensued, with more LAPD cars and a helicopter joining the pursuit, eventually cornering King's vehicle. What followed was a brutal scene of policing, much of which was recorded on video camera by George Holliday, a bystander on his apartment balcony across the way. Police officers alleged that King resisted arrest and claimed that they suspected Rodney King was “dusted,” or high on PCP, phencyclidine (Cannon 1997)—the same suspicion, erroneous both times,

⁴³ One postscript to this phase of counterinsurgency at UCLA must be mentioned. Alondra Nelson (2011) has recounted the history of how (circa 1973) a Black Panthers-led coalition of social movements blocked the materialization of a proposed Center for the Study and Reduction of Violence at the UCLA Neuropsychiatric Institute, to be funded in part by LEAA grants. Pacification by biomedical means, the Center (championed by Governor Ronald Reagan) would have pathologized the dissent of especially racially marginalized youth and target them for “experimental psychiatric studies—including invasive brain surgery” (Nelson 2011: 153-154).

As contemporary critics (Huebner & Kupers 1974) noted, “The research proposed would justify replacing the publicly-visible brutality used at places like Attica [Prison; see Burton 2016] with highly sophisticated mind control techniques, blunting the thrust of dissidence by labeling it mental illness. Not only would this research lead to a medical model of violence which ignores the social context, it would use the most glaring elements of repression in this society—racism, sexism, exploitation of the poor—to accomplish this goal.” While the history of psychiatry falls beyond the scope of my research at present (though see Metzl 2009), the unfinished business of counterinsurgency I do partly trace here (cf. Schrader 2019; Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2019, 2022c) suggests the ambitions behind the Center didn't disappear but probably took more diffuse and less obvious forms.

according to which LAPD officers had restrained and killed James Mincey, Jr. with a chokehold in 1982. Attempting to explain away the murder of Mincey, Jr., LAPD Chief Daryl F. Gates had notoriously remarked of the chokehold technique: “We may be finding that in some blacks when it is applied, the veins and arteries do not open as fast as they do in normal people.”⁴⁴

George Holliday’s videotape—broadcast on TV news by the evening of March 3, 1991 and long after—depicted an excruciatingly lengthy series of officers shooting with a stun gun, kicking, and beating Rodney King, even while he was on the ground (Gooding-Williams 1993). Nevertheless, defense attorneys for the LAPD officers sent to trial later interpreted the same video footage as “careful police response to a dangerous ‘PCP-crazed giant’ who was argued to be in control of the situation” (Goodwin 1994: 606).⁴⁵ Dorothy Gibson, a 52-year old nurse who had witnessed the scene, told *Los Angeles Times* reporters that she had heard King pleading for police officers to stop the assault during the event and had heard police officers, afterwards, “all laughing and chuckling, like they had just had a party” (Tobar & Berger 1991). Mayor Tom Bradley, for his part, exclaimed that he was “shocked and outraged” by the events.

By the end of the week, on May 8, Chief Gates recommended felony prosecutions against three of the assaulting officers and their supervising sergeant, remarking at a press conference, “You will not find a police officer in this city that will in any way attempt to justify what those officers did.” The prolonged scene of abuse, he said, was a “total human failure on the part of that sergeant and many other officers who should have interceded” (quoted in Tobar & Stolberg 1991). Gates (1991) even commissioned an internal investigation (to be chaired by retired

⁴⁴ Archival footage featured in the 2017 documentary *Let It Fall: Los Angeles 1982–1992*, directed by John Ridley.

⁴⁵ In theorizing the notion of “professional vision,” Chuck Goodwin (1994: 606) further concluded that, “The Rodney King trial provides a vivid example of how the ability to see a meaningful event is not a transparent, psychological process but instead a socially situated activity accomplished through the deployment of a range of historically constituted discursive practices.”

California Supreme Court Justice John Arguelles) to conduct “a thorough and diligent search for any underlying reasons why those officers engaged in such lawlessness.” Rather than justifying LAPD actions—as he had, with antiblack pseudoscience, after the murder of James Mincey, Jr.—Gates exceptionalized the assault of Rodney King, or so local critics alleged. The executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California told the *L.A. Times*: “[Gates] still says that this is an aberration and I don’t believe this is an aberration. [...] Instances similar to the one we have on videotape happen all the time” (Tobar & Stolberg 1991).

Even as Gates acknowledged LAPD wrongdoing (“total human failure”) and launched criminal and administrative investigations against the assaulting officers and supervisor, much of the post-March 3 scandal quickly oriented around Gates and his chiefdom (Jacobs 1996).⁴⁶ In April 1991, Mayor Bradley formed his own investigative commission, soon merged with Gates’s Arguelles Panel, to be chaired by Warren Christopher, who had served on the McCone Commission 26 years earlier. Along with Christopher and Justice Arguelles, the Independent Commission included among its 10 members UCLA professor Leo F. Estrada, Occidental College president John Slaughter, and the dean of USC’s School of Medicine, Robert Tranquada. UCLA professor and longtime LAPD advocate James Q. Wilson (co-theorist of the “broken windows” paradigm of policing) agreed to serve as a senior advisor. Speaking to *The Washington Post*, Professor Wilson framed the Commission’s task as “the delicate process of shaping the [police department’s] culture without destroying it”; otherwise LAPD officers would only become “more secretive and prone to cover up misdeeds,” he warned (Mathews 1991).

By July, the Independent Commission on the Los Angeles Police Department (1991), or the Christopher Commission, produced its report. Key recommendations included the

⁴⁶ One *L.A. Times* opinion writer concluded “it is time for Gates to accept the honorable retirement to which his long service entitles him” (Rutten 1991).

replacement of Gates with a new police chief and the implementation of a “new standard of accountability” in the LAPD, as well as a shift to a “community-based policing” model. Some six months later, in February 1992, the Christopher Commission issued a follow-up report, and found signs of “progress.” Yet, as reported in the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, a leading outlet of the Black press in Los Angeles, Warren Christopher diagnosed the ongoing challenge in the following way:

Fundamental progress toward eradicating the problems of excessive force can only be ensured through structural changes—changes which make the chief of police accountable to the public and which strengthen the Police Commission so that it can carry out its duties [...]. Our commission found that this problem of excessive force is essentially a problem of leadership, management and supervision, and we concluded that excessive force will be effectively curbed only when those who command, from the police chief down to the sergeants, are held accountable for the actions of those that they lead. (*Los Angeles Sentinel* 1992a)

So long as Gates remained at the helm of the LAPD, neither the Christopher Commission nor some City Council members nor many Black activists nor the likes of James Q. Wilson would be satisfied that reforms would stick.⁴⁷ As Wilson had told *The Los Angeles Times*, back in July, ““There are a lot of things in the Christopher Commission report that will have to wait on a new chief to be implemented”” (Bunting 1991).

Perhaps ironically, all of the contentious debates about accountability in the first year following the March 3, 1991 “Foothill Incident” nevertheless rested on a commonly held “assumption that criminal convictions were inevitable” for the LAPD officers recorded on camera engaged in the beating of Rodney King (Cannon 1997: 593)—an assumption shared by Chief Gates and Mayor Bradley, if not most Black Angelenos. Yet, on April 29, 1992, a jury in

⁴⁷ At the same time, after the Police Commission placed Gates on administrative leave (only to be quickly reinstated by the City Council soon thereafter), one Angeleno (McIntyre 1991) wrote in a letter to the editor: “Police Chief Daryl Gates is held accountable for something he condemns—the beating of Rodney King—on the principle that responsibility flows up with authority and comes to rest on the desk of the man in charge [...] By this same principle, is Mayor Tom Bradley, the highest authority in Los Angeles and a former career police officer, responsible for anything? It seems that in the mayor’s office the buck stops someplace else.”

Simi Valley, a suburb of Los Angeles with a mostly white population, acquitted all four officers of assault charges and all but one of the officers of charges of excessive force. Only days earlier, a California appeals court had upheld the controversially light sentencing (to probation, community service, and a \$500 fine) of Soon Ja Du, a Korean grocer who had killed Latasha Harlins, a 15 year-old Black girl, for a suspected theft of orange juice (Stevenson 2013).⁴⁸ These two “failures” of “justice,” one after the other in short order, sparked outrage. For the next week rebellion erupted across Los Angeles (especially in the Koreatown neighborhood), more explosively than in Watts in 1965 and perhaps more than ever before—events much discussed elsewhere (e.g., Gooding-Williams 1993; Costa Vargas 2010; Stevenson 2013; Park 2019).

Though this chapter can in no sense offer an adequate history of the 1992 L.A. uprising, a few contemporaneous interpretations of these events are worth mentioning here. On May 6, what turned out to be the final day of uprising, UCLA’s James Q. Wilson (1992) opined in *The Wall Street Journal* that the proper response to the riots was not to “end racism” (a “misleading and, worse, futile” conclusion from the weeks’ events) but “to reduce black crime.” A week later, *The Village Voice* reported one Koreatown shopkeeper in Los Angeles remarking, “Daryl Gates wanted the blacks to let out their outburst toward the Koreans...because he knew that the blacks didn’t feel very good toward the Koreans. I do believe there must have been some conscious politics, because [the police] just weren’t there” (Kim & Yang 1992). Lieutenant Mike Moulin—the acting commander of the LAPD’s 77th Street Station on April 29, 1992, who had ordered the LAPD’s retreat from the intersection of Florence and Normandie, the center of the

⁴⁸ When the initial sentencing of Soon Ja Du was handed down in November 1991, L.A. City Councilman Nate Holden remarked, “The wrong signal could be sent out with this sentence. No one should be given the impression that they could take a person’s life and not be held accountable” (Wilkinson & Clifford 1991). Lou Cannon (1997: 170) later offered a wider cultural-political analysis of this sentence, as representing “a fashionable belief often attributed to liberals that criminal conduct can be excused or mitigated because of social conditions. Such defenses flourish in a society in which it is unfashionable to hold individuals accountable for their actions. Lack of accountability is reinforced by the pop psychology of television talk shows that encourage confession, understanding, and acceptance of the brutal or the bizarre.”

uprising—was worried about a “massacre” (of underprepared and “ill-equipped” officers), as he later told journalist Lou Cannon (1997: 270-324). Though perhaps unusually sensitive to popular anger about the LAPD acquittals in the Rodney King assault cases,⁴⁹ Moulin recalled being “scared to death that they were going to burn our city down” (Cannon 1997: 261). Daryl Gates himself thought Moulin “made a mistake” (or, less diplomatically, “screwed up so badly”) in not sending LAPD officers back into battle at Florence and Normandie; the two would engage in litigation over “slander” for years to come (Newton 1993; Cannon 1997). In May 1992, Stacey Koon, the LAPD sergeant who had overseen the beating of Rodney King and been acquitted of charges thereof, told *CNN*: “Daryl Gates, his finger and his arm are getting a little sore now because he’s pointing at everybody but himself. [...] And I think he has to take responsibility, accountability, at some point in time” (*Los Angeles Sentinel* 1992b: A18).

Daryl F. Gates ceased to be chief of the LAPD on June 27, 1992—replaced by Willie L. Williams, arriving from Philadelphia, as selected by the L.A. Police Commission in April 1992 (Connell & Braun 1992). A few weeks earlier, on June 2, 1992, Los Angeles voters had decisively passed Proposition F to amend the Los Angeles city charter, limiting LAPD Chiefs to one 5-year term (renewable one time) and alter the structure of hiring, firing, and supervising. In a prepared statement, Mayor Bradley remarked that this “victory signifies the overwhelming desire of our people for an accountable Police Department that fights crime instead of being held hostage to the whims of an arrogant, divisive chief of police” (Sahagun & Schwada 1992). Some non-profit community organizations were similarly pleased with the apparent change, but many Los Angeles activists with the Coalition against Police Abuse and the Labor Community Strategy Center were suspicious. As Max Felker-Kantor (2018: 226-227) has thoroughly

⁴⁹ Lou Cannon (1997: 280) quotes a Black LAPD officer, John Edwards, who later “couldn’t believe” (and indeed, in Cannon’s view, “resented”) that Moulin “was saying that he wished police officers had been found guilty.”

reconstructed, these activists insisted that “the charter amendment narrowly focused on the power of the chief, failed to address systemic problems of racism and excessive violence in the LAPD, and aimed at pacifying community outrage through the appearance of significant change.” What’s more, these activists “warned that surface-level reforms to the LAPD would enable the further transformation of the department into an occupying force” (Felker-Kantor 2018: 227). Indeed, even with Gates gone and the role of the Chief changed, problems of “accountability” in Los Angeles and within LAPD would only metastasize.⁵⁰

In *Blind to Injustice*, a recent memoir, Wellford (a.k.a. “Buzz”) Wilms—a UCLA professor of education and policy for more than 40 years—describes how in the aftermath of LAPD’s beating of Rodney King and the 1992 L.A. uprising, he and colleagues from UCLA and USC began an action research project with LAPD, surveying thousands of “rank-and-file cops” from 1994 to 2000 and conducting hundreds of ethnographic “ride-alongs” in patrol cars (Wilms 2020: 50-58). “In addition to helping the police department improve and keeping policy leaders informed, we hoped to develop a model partnership between the city’s two premier universities and the LAPD,” Wilms (2004: 157-158) reflected. The project was “designed to create feedback loops up and down the chain of command to transmit information about employees’ changing perceptions about the external world and work-life and reforms that were being implemented” (Wilms et al. 2002b).

Recall that the Christopher Commission’s recommended reforms in the wake of the scandalous beating of Rodney King centered on replacing Gates, institutionalizing “new standards of accountability,” and experimenting with “community-based policing.” First, the

⁵⁰ LAPD old-timers were not pleased with the Police Commission’s selection of an “outsider” (perhaps especially a Black outsider): “Los Angeles Police Capt. Charles Labrow, the head of the LAPD Command Officers Assn., said his members were ‘wounded’ and ‘disappointed obviously’ by the selection of an outsider. He said LAPD critics ‘talk about holding the department accountable. We want to make sure that applies to the commission as well, that they are accountable for the selection since they’ve gone outside’ (Connell & Braun 1992).

Chiefs: Willie Williams and his successor Bernard C. Parks—L.A.’s first and, to date, only Black chiefs of police—were focal figures of the UCLA/USC officer survey project, with tenures rocked by scandals not entirely or primarily of their making. In Wilms et al.’s (2002a) telling, Chief Williams was an affable (or at least widely-liked outside the department) but ineffectual advocate of community policing, and Chief Parks was in certain respects his opposite, a longtime insider in the LAPD hierarchy but a disciplinary “taskmaster.” In 2002, as the research was wrapping up and the search for Parks’ successor was underway, Wilms and colleagues wrote in an *Los Angeles Times* column that neither Williams’ being ““asleep at the wheel,”” in one officer’s words, nor Parks’ “authoritarian style” would do, if officers’ survey responses and “job satisfaction” rates were any guide (Wilms et al. 2002a). Preliminary survey data along those lines in 2000 “found overwhelming unhappiness among officers about the department’s system for accepting and investigating complaints against police,” while Chief Parks for his part told a *Los Angeles Times* interviewer: “People are upset that the chief is holding them accountable” (Newton 2000). By 2002, the *Times* reported, there were “nearly 6,000 complaint investigations initiated yearly against the LAPD’s 9,000-officer force”; almost 1 in 3 officers faced penalties that year, and while most were as minor as “admonition,” an LAPD discipline board fired 32 cops in 2001 (Leovy 2002).

Not always mentioned explicitly—but (or because) generally ubiquitous around this time, in frequent coverage in the *Los Angeles Times* and other media outlets—was the “Rampart scandal,” which broke in 1998 and festered for years to come. In this scandal (sometimes regarded as “the worst scandal in the history of Los Angeles”), officers in the Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums [CRASH] unit in LAPD’s Rampart Division were found to have engaged in widespread violence against “suspects,” intimidation of potential “witnesses,”

evidence-planting, cover-ups, and framing “innocent” people for CRASH officers’ own actions (Chemerinsky 2001; Felker-Kantor 2018: 241). While Parks responded by dismantling CRASH units and suspending 12 officers in 1998, of whom 5 were eventually fired, the former CRASH officer and “whistleblower” at the center of the scandal, Rafael Pérez,⁵¹ had implicated at least 75 LAPD officers in around 4,000 pages’ worth of testimony (Felker-Kantor 2018: 241). With even cursory calculation, this selective pattern of holding-accountable after Rampart begins to resemble Chief Gates’ response to the beating of Rodney King as “aberration.” Moreover, especially by the spring of 2000 (an election year for district attorneys), Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti publicly challenged Chief Parks’ obstruction of prosecutorial investigations; in one letter, later provided to the *Times*, Garcetti wrote to Parks, “Your refusal to cooperate with our potential prosecutions of crimes committed by members of your department is unacceptable and contrary to your legal responsibilities as chief of police” (Lait & Glover 2000). Although Parks framed the protracted process of investigation and prosecution as the D.A.’s fault,⁵² more outside commentators began to see Parks himself as ultimately responsible for the scandalous activities in the Rampart Division in its entirety and, along the lines of D.A. Garcetti’s suggestions, responsible for neutralizing or covering up the scandal’s fallout (Yagman 2000).⁵³ Indeed, by the following year, a 1998 internal memorandum from LAPD’s Internal

⁵¹ Pérez became a whistleblower only after being caught with 3 kilograms of cocaine he had stolen from a stash previously seized as evidence by LAPD (Lait & Glover 2001). Pérez was also rumored to be a member of the Bloods gang and to have killed Christopher Wallace, the rapper better known as The Notorious B.I.G., in a drive-by shooting near the Petersen Automotive Museum on Wilshire Boulevard in 1997.

⁵² At a March 2000 press conference, Parks commented: “We are not pleased with the slowness of what the D.A. has done, we certainly have some lack of confidence in their ability to deal with the case. [...] But we certainly have not let that stop us from cooperating. [Garcetti] has never been denied any information. We won’t deny him any information, regardless of our frustration” (quoted in Lait & Glover 2000).

⁵³ One civil rights lawyer wrote in the *L.A. Times*: “It’s amazing that, among Los Angeles’ hiding and ducking and bobbing and weaving and finger-pointing government officials, no one has caught blame for the LAPD Rampart scandal. [...] Parks became chief in August 1997. But he, in fact, ran 85% of the LAPD, including the Rampart Division, from 1988 to 1994 and beginning again in 1997. Parks ran LAPD’s intelligence and internal affairs operations from 1994 to 1997. No LAPD manager could be more responsible for the Rampart mess than Parks.

Affairs Group had surfaced, offering provocative suggestion of a policy of obstruction: ““Under no circumstances, shall any complaint investigation investigated by IAG personnel or other department entities [that involves police officers] be presented for district attorney review without the recommendation of the commanding officer, IAG and the concurrence of the chief of staff and chief of police”” (quoted in Domanick 2001).

Amid these cascading scandals, what the UCLA/USC action research team (Wilms et al. 2002b) discerned was that most cops “truly hated” the form of discipline and punishment instituted by the great “disciplinarian” Parks under the framework of “accountability.” Wilms et al. were most concerned about LAPD’s organizational culture—or, rather, cultures—and the widening divide between ‘management’ culture and ‘patrol’ culture, a problem which they found represented in their statistics and more personalized survey data and sought to remedy.⁵⁴ Professor James Q. Wilson’s warning about the ““the delicate process of shaping the [police department’s] culture without destroying it,”” at the time of the Christopher Commission a decade earlier, was then a perceptive prediction—if not actively shaping Wilms et al.’s and LAPD insider’s own perceptions of the “cultural” politics of the police department. In this manner, the “organizational culture” frame and Wilms et al.’s empathy-driven research methods distorted the reality of policing in Los Angeles, a case of misplaced sympathies if not remarkable gullibility. When officers provided responses to survey questions along the lines of ‘I am in police work to help people’ (95% agreed) and ‘Community policing means partnering with

Parks’ attempts to mislead the public and to distance himself from the scandal by claiming he was not there or is new to the scene are not borne out by his own sworn testimony or the historical facts of his own career” (Yagman 2000).

⁵⁴ Wilms et al. weren’t alone: then-USC law professor Erwin Chemerinsky (2001) offered similar analysis of the “pervasive alienation of the rank and file” within LAPD, while making farther-reaching recommendations including support for the federal consent decree. Moreover, Chemerinsky (2001) more vociferously blamed and decried “the culture of the Los Angeles Police Department, which gave rise to and tolerated what occurred in the Rampart Division and elsewhere,” actions he called “heinous” and “unconscionabl[e]” (549-551).

community' (93% agreed), Wilms & his colleagues straightforwardly reported that "it became clear that most officers are guided by altruistic values" and "embrace the principles of community policing" (Wilms et al. 2002b; Wilms 2004, 2020). Also of note, between the 1996 and the 2000 surveys, the percentage of LAPD officers who agreed that they "fear being punished for making an honest mistake" rose from 60% to 79% (Wilms 2004).

Wilms et al.'s (2002b) anodyne questions and then uncritical acceptance and interpretation of LAPD officers' answers effected the same pattern practiced by LAPD Chiefs of framing as aberrant the LAPD actions—which the researchers acknowledged to be "disturbing"—recurring with ever greater frequency and notoriety, or at least more documentation and media attention. Furthermore, the researchers entirely ignored the allegations and evidence of institutionalized forms of LAPD deception accumulating around them in the public sphere. That the reason for all these shortcomings and oversights of Wilms et al.'s research was, no doubt, to preserve and prolong the researchers' working relationships with LAPD management and patrol officers is no good justification.⁵⁵ Wilms et al.'s suspension of disbelief extended further to the question of LAPD racism—a problem diminishing, it seemed to the UCLA/USC researchers, with an increasingly "diverse" workforce within the police department. Yet, even a *Los Angeles Times* reporter noted two years earlier that the team's research "captures flashes of sexism and racism, only to dismiss them as the natural byplay of rough-and-tumble camaraderie forged in police work" (Newton 2000). This naturalization, too, is an affordance of the "organizational culture" concept, at least as deployed here.

⁵⁵ "My openness helped quell any suspicions they may have had," Wilms (2020: 20) later wrote of his engagement with LAPD officers as well as South LA residents and gang interventionists. Wilms reflects on these interpersonal relationships (with specific, often named LAPD officials) at length in his memoir, as on his own and his "own time," Wilms continued surveying LAPD command officers from 2002 to 2008.

All of which is perhaps to say that the UCLA/USC surveyors were “blind to injustice,” a conclusion later made by Professor Wilms himself. For in Wilms’ (2020) memoir of that title, he is chief among those he rebukes for his prior “inability to see or understand” the “poverty and violence in South LA” (“an island, split off from the larger city”), an inability he further generalizes to most “white, affluent Angelinos” ensconced in their own prosperous neighborhoods (Wilms 2020: 30).⁵⁶ Some would call it apartheid Los Angeles; Wilms (2020: 311) takes a split route, first more in line with the prevailing post-color-blindness liberal anti-racism: “Millions of white people hold unconscious racist attitudes like mine.”⁵⁷ Then, in an epilogue written after the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers and the eruption of worldwide protests, including to defund and abolish policing, Wilms (2020: 383) writes: “It’s not enough for whites to claim to be not racist. We need to look more deeply into ourselves to end this curse.” Indeed, he ultimately concludes that “white racism” is a “root cause” of the “horrific violence blacks have suffered at the hands of police” (384-385). But this late 2020 revelation is at odds with much of Wilms’ analysis in preceding chapters of *Blind to Injustice*.

One strange scene in the memoir—which “shocks” Wilms during his later work with gang interventionists in South L.A. (circa 2010-2015)—seems to unsettle the racial accounting through which the professor had previously understood racism and diversity:

⁵⁶ Of UCLA, Wilms writes: “I know that many working-class and poor people have love-hate feelings toward bastions of privilege like UCLA. To many people in this room [a Task Force meeting in South L.A.], the university is like a foreign country. There could be a million miles between it and South LA, rather than the mere 20 miles that separate us” (2020: 234).

⁵⁷ Wilms’ (2020) story is complicated, often disturbing, and more circuitous than most white liberal professors’, having grown up in Jim Crow Arkansas with a juvenile fascination with “Adolf Hitler and his Nazis” (157) before flunking out of school, joining the Army, moving to San Francisco, and joining an interracial therapy group led by a friend of Maya Angelou’s just before Angelou became famous. Whatever potential for ‘change’ his story represents, Wilms concludes instead, “I’m no stranger to my own racism and am the first to admit that I probably will never finish ridding myself of bigoted beliefs that I don’t put on public display” (153).

‘You know, the racial makeup of the LAPD has changed since 1992,’ I say. ‘Back then, 76 percent of the cops were white. Today it’s 36 percent.’ My nerdy comment touches a nerve that nearly sends Coach D over the edge. This huge man draws up in his chair, looks me in the eye, and suddenly, he is in my face, gesturing wildly. ‘I don’t care if they’re white, black, brown or purple,’ he explodes. ‘They’re all blue! They all come out of the same machine. They just want to tell you what to do, especially if you’re black. I’ve seen it all, and it’s the same as it was for me growing up.’ (Wilms 2020: 303)

But all this avowedly shocking exchange compels Wilms toward, narratively, is statistical research from the Department of Justice detailing the rather equal rates of Black and white police officers shooting Black suspects, as well as analysis from his UCLA colleague Alexander Astin “showing that nine out of 10 murder victims who are black are also killed by blacks” (Wilms 2020: 304). Then invoking research by “Harvard economist Sendhil Mullainathan” (2015), Wilms’ conclusion is not that police officers of any race are especially racist, but that “African Americans are being killed by police at a disproportionately high rate because they have more encounters with police and their neighborhoods are not safe” (2020: 305).

In this, even Wilms’ profound sense of regret about blindness to injustice cannot shake his fixation on statistical reasoning nor his ability to find hope in what others might see as the recapitulation of the changing same. In the final chapter before the post-George Floyd epilogue, Wilms (2020: 373) writes:

My years with the LAPD and the community have shown me that forces are at work that are slowly bringing forth badly needed changes. Pressures for reforming the LAPD have been relentless over the past 25 years. More than two-thirds of all its officers have left during that time, replaced by younger cops who better reflect the racial makeup of the city. A new generation of command officers now sit in positions where they can translate pressures for change into action, most notably in the Community Safety Program, which holds real promise.

This promise Wilms finds in the LAPD’s Community Safety Partnership [CSP] is especially egregious considering his own role in advocating for a “commitment to community policing” as “the answer” to the organizational troubles of the LAPD since the Christopher Commission and

the scandalous 1990s (Wilms et al. 2002a) before his gradual realization that “community policing” amounted to “little more than feel-good platitudes” (Wilms 2020: 366). Then, all it took was a “chance conversation with LAPD sergeant Alma Burke” to “open[his] eyes” to the “promising signs”—indeed—that this “contemporary model of policing,” CSP, “could not only help reform the LAPD, it could serve as a national model” (366, 371, 381). Is this what “look[ing] more deeply into ourselves to end this curse” of violent, racist policing (Wilms 2020: 383) should look like? After all, the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2022c: 34) has found this same LAPD “community policing” program to be merely “a vehicle to mask the department’s harm,” a “friendly” face on a violent institution, and a paradigmatic form of counterinsurgency. Even open eyes can’t see everything.⁵⁸

But there’s more. Wilms (2020: 372) approvingly cites the support for CSP of Connie Rice, a “civil rights” attorney who parlayed lawsuits against the LAPD into a proverbial seat at the table, a dedicated parking spot at LAPD headquarters downtown, and co-authored op-eds with then-LAPD chief Charlie Beck (Beck & Rice 2016, 2021) extolling the possibilities and successes of community policing in Los Angeles (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a). As proof of concept and success, moreover, Beck and Rice (2021) point to an “independent UCLA evaluation [which] confirms that with CSP, ‘the community feels protected and strengthened.’”

The relationships of the University and the Police traced across this chapter reach yet another link (in an as-yet unending chain) in this purportedly “independent” report, “Evaluation of the LAPD Community Safety Partnership” (Leap et al. 2020), as the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a) have helpfully detailed. Researchers for the report included Jeff Brantingham, a UCLA professor and founder of the policing technology firm PredPol (discussed in the Introduction to this thesis), and Jorja Leap, an adjunct professor in UCLA’s Luskin School

⁵⁸ Vision, professional (Goodwin 1994) and otherwise, is as much about what can’t be seen as what can.

“whose husband Mark Leap was LAPD Deputy Chief of Counterterrorism under Bill Bratton,” who led LAPD from 2002 to 2009 (Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a). The Advisory Committee for the report included L.A. City Council member Joe Buscaino, a former LAPD officer who cited UCLA’s “rigorous evaluation” to call for increasing (“smart”) investment in LAPD’s budget (Buscaino 2020), as well as an LAPD “special assistant” and former chair of the L.A. Police Commission named Gerald Chaleff.⁵⁹ Funding for UCLA’s evaluation research and report was “generously provided” by a small group of wealthy philanthropies and L.A. real estate magnates (Leap et al. 2020). Even though these far-reaching, long-standing, and intimate institutional interconnections are barely hidden, the claim to independence and its associations of unbiased objectivity in recommending more of the same is perhaps the greatest benefit the University proffers to the Police today. And just as Harry M. Scoble asked of his colleagues after the Watts Rebellion and the City’s McCone Commission in 1965, these continued 21st-century University/Police collaborations raise “central questions of whether social scientists are being used as legitimizers of the status quo in politics. If they are, are they aware of it?” (Scoble 1966: 180). At the very least, these social scientists have been *made aware* of their role in what a coalition of community organizations and many UCLA scholars and students concerned by the CSP evaluation described, in an open letter to the UCLA Luskin School, as “the influence of academia and philanthropy [being] weaponized against community interests” (Youth Justice Coalition et al. 2020: 3). Moreover, the letter points to the glaring logical inconsistency (or, rather, ideological consistency) in how the research “finds numerous inconsistencies, unknowns, and a lack of transparency surrounding LAPD’s Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Watts,

⁵⁹ Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021c) has previously characterized Gerald Chaleff as having “a long history of using LAPD violence to propose useless reforms and increased police resources, stretching back to when he served as Deputy Counsel to the commission to examine police violence after the 1992 uprising,” the Webster Commission (yet another commission that cannot be discussed in detail in this chapter but holds to the pattern charted here).

but nevertheless recommends the program be continued with increased funding” (Youth Justice Coalition et al. 2020: 1). In such a situation, questions of mere awareness cease to be sufficient. Recall Scoble’s (1966: 180) second question: “what are the private exchange values [that social scientists] derive from association with a special commission of this kind?”

Across decades of police violence and scandals in Los Angeles, the willingness of some academics to partner with the LAPD—to be “weaponized” in the arsenal of police warfare—has often emerged from an avowed desire to *improve* but resulted in *entrenching* and *expanding* police action, at least in the view of social movements like the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a) and Critical Resistance (2020), an abolitionist organization founded at a conference at the University of California, Santa Cruz (Davis 2003). As highlighted more thoroughly in Parts i and ii, for all the forms of collaboration engaged by university scholars with policing, there have also been persistent rejections of and rebellions against this institutional status quo, a tradition continued in this recent open letter. This history is riddled with contestations and contradictions.

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One set of contradictions surfacing in this chapter clusters around the term “accountability.” Although termed as such only since the 1990s in the archive assembled here—and already conceivable by then as a “buzz word” (Aubry 1991)—this thesis takes “accountability” as a lens to understand the range of commissions, reports, and other forms of talk and text proliferating in crisis and scandal, linguistic phenomena discussed at length in the following chapter. In and around the LAPD in recent decades, “accountability” has named an internal organizational logic (or “standard” desired by the Christopher Commission) of discerning cause-effect, shifting responsibility upwards to superiors, and subjecting employees to punishment and removal, as well as an external relationship of deference to “the public” at large.

Mayor Bradley and many public commentators viewed Chief Daryl Gates as unaccountable (because no other institutional agent could dislodge him from his post, at least until the passage of the City Charter Amendment in 1992). By contrast, a few years later, many LAPD officers and the UCLA/USC action research team viewed Chief Bernard Parks as taking accountability to the other extreme, ruining the LAPD's balance of "organizational culture" in the process—even as, unacknowledged by the University, Parks ran cover for the "Rampart scandal."

From "the public" seeking accountability with Chief Gates to Chief Parks enforcing accountability among rank-and-file officers, and beyond, are these forms of *accountability* the same thing? I examine this question in greater detail and from other angles in the following chapter, where I argue that insider and outsider projects of accountability seldom deliver the consequences many imagine or describe them as having. Too often, instead, accountability pursuits defer reckonings with the institutionalized status quo, "provid[ing] the least substantive accommodation deemed necessary and therefore...preserv[ing] as nearly as possible the existing distribution of power" (Scoble 1966: 180). Indeed, in both of the otherwise quite dissimilar Gates and Parks cases, public attention to accountability individualized in the figure of the Chief problems of much greater scale and deeper implication.

Here the words of L.A. City Councilman Joe Buscaino (2020) are all too appropriate: "LAPD has done an incredible job transforming into a more diverse, accountable and professional department, but the work is never done." But "the war goes on" (Coleman 1993).

Chapter 2. Angles of Police Accountability

What is there left, to destroy? That is not close, or closer. Leaning away in the angle of language.

Amiri Baraka (fka Le Roi Jones) (1964), “Like Rousseau”

i. Pivot Points

On April 21, 2020, the Los Angeles Police Department’s Chief Michel Moore announced the severing of LAPD’s contract with PredPol, a “predictive policing” algorithm and software company founded by a group of researchers at the University of California. Although a community movement led by the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition had waged a years-long campaign calling for the rejection and dismantling of PredPol and other policing and surveillance technologies (see Moravec 2019), Chief Moore claimed that COVID-19 budgetary challenges were the impetus for the move (Miller 2020). A few months later, after a series of high-profile police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd (to name only two) and a nationwide uprising against racism, police violence, and policing itself, an open letter signed by more than 1,400 mathematicians called for a boycott of “predictive policing” research, citing PredPol as an example of the algorithmic compounding of racially-biased input data into future police bias (Castelvecchi 2020). On March 2, 2021, PredPol announced a change of name to Geolitica and a change of focus, noting:

Sometimes an answer is right in front of you but it takes a while to recognize it. Our customers helped us realize that our greatest value was not on the “predictive” side of the business, but on the accountability and transparency side. [Geolitica](#) is really about patrol operations management. We improve transparency between your department and your community. We provide accountability for your officers. And we make your department more effective at keeping your community safe with the resources you have. (PredPol 2021)

One might conclude that, up to that point, “PredPol misread the sentiment about how to think about predictive policing and didn’t pivot to a more police accountability focus in time,” as one law professor wrote to an LAPD captain colleague in a 2019 email, surfaced in Stop LAPD Spying Coalition’s (2021a: 67-72) California Public Records Act requests of communication between academics and LAPD personnel. Indeed, in an email the year prior (included in the same batch of public records), that same law professor Andrew G. Ferguson—publicly an outspoken critic of big data policing and surveillance—had privately pitched an “accountability” “pivot” as a marketing opportunity to one of PredPol’s competitors: “Have you guys thought about spinning out a new product (not predictive policing) but branded solely for police accountability? A city could choose which version they wanted (and really they would have the same backbone and data capabilities)” (quoted in Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a: 67). PredPol’s own turn to “accountability”—belated but perhaps not too late, and requiring less technological change than corporate spin—surely stemmed from the recognition that, in Professor Ferguson’s terms, “bad press” is “bad for business” (quoted in Stop LAPD Spying Coalition 2021a: 71).

What does “accountability” mean, and why was “accountability” available and attractive as a new slogan for a policing-technology firm in the throes of compounding crises of “bad” publicity (policing-technology’s and policing’s)?⁶⁰ A short answer could start with recognizing “accountability” as already a keyword in use for, among other things, critiquing, challenging, and attempting to govern police (*and* algorithms), in the U.S. and beyond.⁶¹ Before but especially

⁶⁰ Though Geolitica also markets “transparency” and other similarly enregistered terms, I focus on “accountability” in this chapter—in future work I will disentangle these concepts as comprising distinct semiotic functions, based on my brief discussion in Part iv below.

⁶¹ On algorithmic accountability, see Reddy et al. (2019) and Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021b), e.g.; on accountability as a key modality of late-capitalist governance and “audit culture,” see Strathern (2000); on accountability in anthropology, quite differently, see Jacobs-Huey (2002).

during the national antiracism protests of 2020, the term “accountability” clustered among what critic Lauren Michele Jackson (2020), writing in *The New Yorker*, called the “D.I.Y. verbiage endemic to the self-care branch of social justice” (along with ‘redress,’ ‘harm,’ ‘gaslit,’ ‘belonging,’ etc.). Since 2020, invocations of “accountability” have swelled across avowedly or aspirationally antiracist publics, through social media, legacy media (e.g., Kornhaber 2020), and the organizational genres of the workshop and the training (Anderson 2021; DiAngelo n.d.).⁶² Consider, too, Minnesota’s progressive Attorney General Keith Ellison’s remarks, on April 20, 2021, upon the exceptional guilty verdict reached in the trial of the officer who killed George Floyd: “I would not call today’s verdict ‘justice’, however, because justice implies true restoration. But it is accountability, which is the first step towards justice.” Ellison—a Black man, the first Muslim American ever elected to Congress back in 2006, and one of the earliest endorsers of democratic socialist Bernie Sanders’ first presidential run in 2016—could fairly be regarded as fluent in contemporary U.S. progressive and social justice speech varieties, moreso even than most other attorneys general. Yet, as an attorney and his state’s highest legal officer, no less, Ellison is also *necessarily* fluent in the language of U.S. law (Mertz 2007), in which “accountability” has had a long and arguably quite different career in recent decades.⁶³

This lexical state of affairs is complex. “Accountability” is a term in use by “social justice” activists (before, in, and around the Movement for Black Lives, e.g.), lawyers (ranging from prosecutors, of varying degrees of progressiveness, to the National Association for

⁶² Robin DiAngelo—coiner of the term “white fragility,” bestselling author, and prolific workshop provider—has epitomized the lucrative (politically/ethically dubious) contradictions of promoting “antiracism” and “accountability.”

⁶³ Speaking of careers, Ellison’s becoming an Attorney General arguably makes a paradox of any “progressive” politics, as has been argued of the so-called “progressive prosecutor” phenomenon generally (e.g., Note 2018). Less paradoxically, Savannah Shange (2019) has argued instead that contemporary U.S. progressivism (even when distinctly multiracial) retains the carceral and anti-Black politics of non-‘progressive’ ideologies—or, indeed, of earlier Progressive movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including those of northern U.S. social reformers (Hartman 2019).

Criminal Defense Lawyers [2020]),⁶⁴ as well as corporations and their (for-hire or *pro bono*) advisers. But do these (already more and less heterogeneous) groups of people mean the same things when they talk about “accountability,” or mean them in the same ways? Bringing these questions to bear on Geolitica’s rebranding and the evidence summarily presented thus far raises two plausible, but partly conflicting, interpretations. First is the possibility that PredPol/Geolitica appropriated or co-opted the terms of its critics in order to neutralize further criticism, recontextualizing “accountability” (and “transparency,” etc.) within an institutional—indeed, corporate—project at odds with the intended aims of critical publics who had raised claims of “accountability” in the first place. Alternatively, “accountability” could have been a vague concept all along, “denotationally indeterminate” and not meaning much of anything in itself, and therefore available for strategic redeployment by a policing-technology firm seeking to change the terms of its publicity (Urciuoli 2008: 212, 214). These interpretations—call them the *co-optation* concern and the *vagueness* concern—differently situate the meaning (or lack of meaning) of “accountability” in the word or in the contexts of its use, in the intentions of its user or in the potential understandings of its interpreters (Chun 2016), though there is also a reasonable synthesis whereby the vagueness of “accountability” makes it most friendly for co-optation.

A third, obverse possibility—that PredPol/Geolitica has in fact brought its own technology/product, and not merely its sloganeering, in line with public desires for police “accountability”—becomes difficult to fathom upon minimal inspection of PredPol’s and

⁶⁴ “Accountability” discourse *among U.S. lawyers* presents interpretive puzzles that must be tackled in separate work, especially the fact that prosecutors could speak of pursuing and securing “accountability” and/or “justice” (linked to such an extent that A.G. Ellison would then want to explicitly differentiate them) while also being targeted by (competing) public “accountability” projects in their own right (Keenan et al. 2011; Zack 2020), such as those registered at www.prosecutorialaccountability.com and www.prosecutepolicecrimes.com, as well as the National Association for Criminal Defense Lawyers’ Full Disclosure Project and Law Enforcement Accountability Database Project, e.g.

Geolitica’s promotional materials, advertised to a clientele that has continued to consist primarily of police department executives.⁶⁵ It is essential to note here that PredPol’s (2021) propositional declaration, “We provide accountability for your officers,” is highly unusual in linking “accountability” to any prepositional phrase (“for your officers”) at all, and all the more mysterious because of it. Does the preposition “for” indicate that police “officers” are the target or, quite oppositely, the beneficiary of “accountability”? In lieu of directly asking PredPol/Geolitica’s executives and communications specialists what they were trying to say and what “accountability” means to them—a highly unlikely ethnographic scene—or quickly construing this indeterminacy as “doublespeak” (Lutz 1989), hiding PredPol’s intended non-/implication within an opaque and contradictory set of others, I am most concerned in this thesis with the ideologies (of language, politics, and law) that keep these implications of “accountability” unremarkable but also unclear so much more often. Indeed, there is a stark lack of mass-public commentary on what “accountability” means (and how) in proportion to its pervasive usage and valorization (for one interesting exception, see: Anderson 2021).

Meanings or, better, conditions of meaning are never settled once and for all but, instead, are configured by particular people in particular social situations in what linguistic anthropologists have called “language ideologies” (Schieffelin et al. 1998; Kroskrity 2000), variously conscious and unconscious, explicit and implicit ways of conceiving “links between linguistic forms and social phenomena” (Irvine & Gal 2000: 37). In Part ii, I discuss how linguistic anthropologists have conceptualized the *pragmatic* and *metapragmatic* dimensions of

⁶⁵ On the political economy of policing technology, see the essential work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore (2016), Brian Jefferson (2020), and the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a). Socio-legal studies of the rise of big-data policing—by the likes of Andrew G. Ferguson (2017) and Sarah Brayne (2021), scholars appearing in the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition’s Public Records Act requests of communication with LAPD personnel and campaigns against “academic complicity”—have often highlighted the frictions between police chiefs and lower-level officers over the use of policing technologies like PredPol and over expectations or risks of “accountability.”

both everyday language use and (more and less) formalized language ideologies, including in legal and political realms. This outline will provide a semiotic basis for connecting concerns about “accountability”—the word, its modes of meaning, and their ideological configurations—to broader debates about law and policing in a putatively democratic (which is also to say a historically violent and exceptionally carceral) society.⁶⁶

The short answers I have teased to explain the sudden centrality of “accountability” in the verbal and conceptual repertoire of one notoriety-stricken policing-technology firm (that PredPol’s Geolitica pivot co-opted the term “accountability” from social movement speech, or that “accountability” is and was a vague demand to begin with) are mostly true, I argue, but also and more importantly insufficient. In their simplest forms, the co-optation and vagueness critiques mostly occlude from view the more persistent and promiscuous circulation of the lexical item “accountability” across different registers and social spheres in the United States. To note only that PredPol/Geolitica (or, for that matter, Attorney General Keith Ellison) deployed in 2021 one of the buzziest buzzwords from the previous year’s public reckoning with racism and policing—adopting critical terminology to obscure or distance the associations between their work and policing (and more implicitly with racism, if especially the institutional and systemic kinds)—would obscure the seemingly contradictory fact that “accountability” was in use within institutional discourses by (particular) policing advocates and defenders before “accountability” was ever valorized from outside by critics and protesters against policing, the carceral system, and institutional racism.⁶⁷ In this chapter, therefore, I aim to offer a more complete and

⁶⁶ On histories of violence and policing in U.S. and California state/imperial projects, I have relied upon the work of Saidiya Hartman (1997, 2019), Angela Y. Davis (2003), Ned Blackhawk (2006), Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007), Sarah Haley (2016), Benjamin Madley (2016), Kelly Lytle Hernández (2017), Shannon Speed (2019), and many more.

⁶⁷ Apart from the doctrinal/jurisprudential tradition to be discussed in Part iii, worth mentioning here is an efflorescence of “accountability” talk around the Rodney King beating and among major U.S. police chiefs in the 1990s, from a 1996 speech at the Heritage Foundation by former-NYPD commissioner and future-LAPD chief Bill Bratton entitled “Decentralizing and Establishing Accountability” (Henry 2003: 25; Jefferson 2020: 115) to the

contradictory picture of the legal, political, and language ideologies mystifyingly reflected in the practice ideal named “accountability” by tracking a more complicated route of this slogan-concept’s uptake in policing *and* anti-policing discourse.⁶⁸ This semiotic study of “accountability,” upside down and inside out, will also involve returning to notions of “vagueness” and “co-optation” from new angles and with new insight.

In what follows, I look beyond the recent rebranding efforts of PredPol/Geolitica to analyze a broader, historically-evolving set of language practices and ideologies in the law and politics of policing and abolition. In Part iii, I retrace a metapragmatic debate in U.S. courts and jurisprudence in which “accountability” was formulated in legal doctrine as a remedy to “vagueness” and counterbalance to “discretion.” Attending to one U.S. Supreme Court case (*Kolender v. Lawson*) and to commentary by legal scholars since the 19th century, I detail how proper governance (the making of law in legislatures or the enforcement of law on the street) has been debated and adjudicated via the proper pragmatic implications of legal language in the courtroom and beyond. This particular juridical history makes clear that both the slogan-concept and the practice of “accountability”—in the legalist register and beyond—must be recognized as first and foremost invoked and instantiated in/by language.⁶⁹ In Part iv, then, I draw on the preceding discussion to sketch an outline of a semiotic model of the “accountability” ideal.

tenure of LAPD chief Bernard C. Parks, discussed in Ch. 1. Indeed, by 1991, “accountability” was already plausibly considered a “buzz word throughout the country” (Aubry 1991: A6).

⁶⁸ Here my inspiration is Stuart Hall et al.’s (1978) *Policing the Crisis*, which models the same task for demystifying and contesting the pop-criminological diagnosis of “mugging” at the center of a “moral panic” in postcolonial Britain. The notion, and attendant methodology, of the “slogan-concept” I have learned from Dorothy Noyes (2016).

⁶⁹ Apart from linguistic anthropology, this line of thinking also draws inspiration from other critical-theoretical work from the likes of Judith Butler (1997, 2003), Marianne Constable (2014), and especially Hazel V. Carby (2019), who has made “accounts” and “accounting” central thematics in her historical/autobiographical study of the transatlantic slave trade, the British empire, and their afterlives.

ii. Pragmatics, Metapragmatics, Ideologies

What does “accountability” mean (or what has “accountability” meant), with respect to policing in the United States? As first posed, this chapter’s central question might seem to solicit semantic answers or even a definitive denotational answer of what the word “accountability” ought to mean, otherwise subject to misuse or abuse. Consider the possibility that “accountability” has meant *X*, *Y*, or *Z*...or hasn’t stably meant anything...or meant *X* until it meant *Z*. Yet, as Michael Silverstein (1976, 1993, 1996) and other linguistic anthropologists have repeatedly insisted, these kinds of questions and answers—and the concerns about vagueness or co-optation (at least as formulated above) haunting them—amount to only one particular mode of interpreting how meaning works. In one study of American English, Silverstein suggested that, especially in sociolinguistic contexts like the “monoglot standard” public culture of the U.S., “folk views about the functions of language will characteristically center on the functional capacity of words and expressions as the salient, formulable interest of native speakers in their language” (1996: 287). While dominant and socially consequential in its own right (in some socio-linguistic spheres), this “folk” lexicology is arguably the least revealing or accurate way of understanding the myriad phenomena organized around and by the slogan-concept of “accountability” or, following Silverstein, of understanding language writ large.

Semiotic analysis holds that any potential *denotational* meaning of “accountability” is only ever the effect (and often, correspondingly, the mystification) of more foundational semiotic processes, especially the pointing-to that has been called *indexicality* after the coinage of the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (Silverstein 1976, 1998).⁷⁰ Linguistic

⁷⁰ Susan Gal and Judith Irvine’s innovative reformulation of Peircean thought posits comparison/differentiation as a more essential or encompassing process of meaning than indexicality proper: “To posit something as an index (or any other kind of sign) one needs the fundamental notions of *attention* and *contrast*: to grasp the sign as figure-against-background” (2019: 18). In this chapter I take for granted and leave unspecified many of the conditions of comparison highlighted in their work.

anthropologists direct attention to the flows (and blockages) of discursive interaction in social life (Silverstein 1993), including to the specificities of speech occasion (who? where? when?), audience (addressed to whom? available to whom?), and other differently-indexed dimensions of context. Indeed, context is itself a product of indexical signaling, in a dialectic between contingent real-time interaction and historically-accreted and culturally-typologized expectations of communicative possibility (Silverstein 1979, 2003).⁷¹ In this way, at least as important as the unique features of any actually-occurring scene of sign-mediated sociality are forms of interdiscursivity that link speech events in various (more and less reflexively formalized) schemata such as genres, registers, and ideologies (e.g., Briggs & Bauman 1992; Agha 2005; Kroskrity 2015).

Any search for denotation thus emerges from and participates in a particular interdiscursive formulation of language use as the arrangement of (especially oral or graphic) signs into words that have (semantic) meaning in reference to something in or about the world and in relation to other word-signs (via syntax, grammar).⁷² Although reference amounts to one kind of indexicality, culturally-typologized notions of denotation risk reifying this one propositional relation (word *Q* indexing something *X*) as abstract and stable while obfuscating most other differently-indexed dimensions of context. (Exemplified in English by words like ‘I’ and ‘you,’ ‘here’ and ‘there,’ the lexical type called deictics or shifters—apparent in “every known language” and exceptional to any purportedly context-free semanticoreferential rule—has accordingly attracted a great deal of scrutiny by Silverstein [1976, 2004] and others.) If semantics is the project of language-as-(purified-)reference and pragmatics concerns “the

⁷¹ Delineating co-text from context is a key part of Silverstein’s (e.g., 1993) work but beyond the scope of this chapter.

⁷² Though having “formed the basis for linguistic theory and linguistic analysis in the Western tradition” (Silverstein 1976: 14), this ideology of referentiality is no less particular for its universalistic explanatory aspirations and wide and durable uptake. Peircean semiotics is a particular kind of universalist ideology, too, but to my mind a *better* one.

meanings of linguistic signs relative to their communicative functions,” then, as Silverstein contended (1976: 20), semantics is only a “special kind” of pragmatics, just as reference is *only* one kind of indexicality and one function of language use among many (cf. Jakobson 1960).⁷³ Semantics, as understood in U.S. “folk” views and perhaps in some (non-semiotic) “expert” linguistics, seems a paradigmatic form of the “rationalizing, systematizing, and, indeed most importantly, *naturalizing* schemata [...] that ‘explain’ the indexical value of signs in terms of some order(s) of phenomena stipulatively presupposable by—hence, in context, autonomous of—the indexical phenomena to be understood” (Silverstein 1998: 129).

By contrast, this chapter engages a semiotic investigation of the socially meaningful (because dynamically indexical) processes organized by and around the word “accountability.” My analysis relies upon two of Silverstein’s (1976, 1979, 1993, 2003) signal interventions in the study of indexicality and (meta)pragmatic function,⁷⁴ as well as related insights from a wave of anthropological research on language ideologies (Irvine 1989; Schieffelin et al. 1998; Kroskrity 2000, 2015). First, indexicality can be contrasted along two principal axes of distinction: alongside the referential/nonreferential distinction discussed above, all indexical signs *presuppose* particular already-existing (indeed, often already-schematized) “contextual features” and/or creatively *entail* the “existence-in-context-of the indexed feature” (Silverstein 1976:

⁷³ Prague School semiotician Roman Jakobson’s (1960) typology of six functions of language profoundly influenced Silverstein and many generations of linguistic anthropologists. According to Jakobson, along with any abstracted referential message (if any), language use also—always, though to varying degrees—involves a suite of mostly “accessory” but significant pragmatic implications. These communicative functions involve conveying a “speaker’s attitude” to worldly propositions and interpersonal “orientation” to addressees, “prolonging communication” between speaker and addressee, clarifying a shared understanding of “lexical code,” and what Jakobson intriguingly called “promoting the palpability of signs” via *poetic* function (Jakobson 1960: 354-356).

⁷⁴ NB: Silverstein (2004: 650) himself insisted that what was early on understood as a “programmatically” intervention was first of all a “culminative systematizing of post-Saussurean, indeed Peircean insights from Jakobson, Jerzy Kuryłowicz, and Emile Benveniste,” etc., indeed a “spelling out” of “commonplaces of their teaching.” Silverstein’s early work (1979) also constituted an extension of the cut-short anthropological project of Benjamin Lee Whorf.

29-37, 1979: 206-207).⁷⁵ Put another way, “people not only speak about, or refer to the world ‘out there’—outside of language—they also presuppose (or reflect) and create (or fashion) a good deal of social reality by the very activity of using language” (Silverstein 1979: 194). Presupposition and entailment are “*co-present* dimensions of indexicality” or, as Silverstein (1993: 36, 2003: 210) later elaborated, the “micro-dialectic [...] of which indexicality actually consists.” Without recourse to a chicken-or-egg puzzle of originary priority, this interdiscursive model makes recognizable how seemingly *sui generis* (or at least newly contextually configured) indexical entailments can become the grounds for presuppositions in subsequent semiotic scenes, as well as how particular presuppositions can “yield” corresponding entailments in “effective” social action (Silverstein 2003: 203-204). The “mediating factor between pragmatic presupposition and pragmatic entailment” is what Silverstein (1993: 37, 2003: 196-197) called *metapragmatic function*, the “regiment[ing of] indexicals into interpretable event(s) of such-and-such type,” as well as its explicit elaboration in *metapragmatic discourse* that “describes, explains, or rationalizes the pragmatics of language use.” Silverstein’s theorization of *metapragmatics* is an essential precursor to my analysis.

Much like the “folk” construal of referential meaning as semantic rather than (actually or at least fundamentally) pragmatic, Silverstein held that the functioning of presupposing/entailing indexicality is equally unrecognized or misrecognized by “native speakers” of any language. People commonly regard their own and others’ strategic (“goal-directed”) and socially efficacious language use to depend on the “effectiveness” and “suitability” of words, word-stems, phrases, and sentences (i.e., culturally recognizable “referential-and-predicational” “units” and “structures” of language), rather than the interplay of (referential and nonreferential,

⁷⁵ Other linguistic anthropologists have also helpfully contrasted indexical phenomena as direct/indirect (Ochs 1990) and positive/negative (Hills 2008), e.g., but my analysis focuses on presupposition and entailment.

presupposing and entailing) indexicals that is more difficult to “segment,” make concrete, and consciously reflect upon (Silverstein 1979, 1993, 2003).⁷⁶ Yet, these *metapragmatic* formulations of language function do not merely naturalize and obscure pragmatic indexicality but function dynamically, affecting discrete interactional scenes, interdiscursive patterns, and the very structure of language (Silverstein 1979: 231).

The pragmatic function of language is dialectically entangled with the metapragmatic in social life, and each is a site around which language ideologies form (as is the scholarly study of language), as Susan U. Philips (2000) has shown ethnographically in her study of Tongan language ideologies in Tongan courts (cf. Kroskrity 2000).⁷⁷ In and around the courtroom, but not only there, it is clear to see how what Silverstein (1993: 55) described as “explicit metapragmatic registers instantiated in metapragmatic discourse encapsulate ideologies of language use and play an obvious role in the institutionalization of discursive mechanisms of society.” As Elizabeth Mertz (2007) has shown, the language ideology that dominates in U.S. law—not least because highly cultivated, or metapragmatically regimented, in U.S. legal instruction—“inexorably” involves the transformation of “stories of human conflict, complete with their social contexts and moral overtones, [...into] new readings focused on layers of textual and legal authority” (2007: 56). The ideology of language identified by Mertz underwrites my discussion in Part iii of the pragmatic and metapragmatic organization of a U.S. Supreme Court decision, one instance of a special genre of “textual and legal authority” authorized, in an

⁷⁶ In a withering summation of Anglo-American speech act theory, another “folk” view of language, Silverstein (1979: 215-216) mused: “It is no wonder that in societies which hyper-rationalize effective means to practical ends, such as our own, there is a constant historical creation of new explicit performative formulae from older metapragmatic means cast into appropriate verb or verb-phrase forms” (215-216).

⁷⁷ The relationship between Philip’s (2000) multi-sited schema and Silverstein’s (2003) “*n*+1 indexical orders”—linking the “micro-contextual” to the “macro-sociological”—is worth spelling out at a later date. As Alan Rumsey (1990: 356) has also argued, “The courtroom situation is, of course, a very special one, in which language use is explicitly focused upon, to a far greater extent than in most everyday conversations.”

institutional division of linguistic labor, to adjudicate and comment on other forms of “textual and legal authority,” such as the police officer’s and the legislator’s.

The linguistic-anthropological study of the pragmatics, metapragmatics, and ideologies of language use offers a unique analytical toolkit for considering the problem of the “meaning” of “accountability” raised at the start of this chapter. The pivoting situation described in Part i is *not* what Michael Silverstein (2003: 212) would have characterized as “‘different ways of saying ‘the same’ thing,’” via “putatively denotationally-equivalent words and expressions”—a phenomenon of registers actually involving a “folk” metapragmatic interpretation of the concurrence or even “consubstantiality” of “indexical form and contextual condition-of-appropriateness.” Instead, the ‘synchronic’ use of the term “accountability” by protesters, progressive prosecutors, and PredPol/Geolitica raises the specter of the ‘same’ way of saying potentially ‘different’ things, the sharing (or potentially strategic appropriation) of a lexical item obscuring different contextual presuppositions and entailments, especially ongoing institutional relationships with policing.

Though the surface of this pragmatic/metapragmatic/ideological assemblage has barely been scratched, the following section of this chapter will recontextualize further the word and idea of “accountability.” Part iii involves a detour through juridical and jurisprudential history, centered on the “void-for-vagueness doctrine,” a metapragmatic discourse in U.S. courts configuring the legal and linguistic relationships between courts, legislature, police, and other persons (U.S. citizens or not). Through a case study of *Kolender v. Lawson*—a 1983 Supreme Court decision concerning, micro-contextually, a (highly racialized) pattern of police harassment in southern California and, macro-sociologically, the form of democratic governance—and some of its aftermath, I propose that the indexical implications of the ideal and practice of

“accountability” are troublesome *now* (in the 2020s) not because of their differences but because of their similarities.

iii. Vagueness Doctrine

Within a two-year span, from 1975 to 1977, Edward Lawson was stopped, detained, or arrested by police at least 15 times in and around San Diego, pursuant to one section of the California Penal Code (cf. Stormer & Bernstein 1984). (It is important to note that charges were brought against Lawson in court only twice, resulting in one dismissal and one conviction. Among many potential conclusions to be drawn from this fact, I suggest an understanding of policing as less about responding to “criminal” conduct than enforcing a particular social/racial order.) § 647(e) defined the criminal misdemeanor of “disorderly conduct” pertaining to anyone:

Who loiters or wanders upon the streets or from place to place without apparent reason or business and who refuses to identify himself and to account for his presence when requested by any peace officer so to do, if the surrounding circumstances are such as to indicate to a reasonable man that the public safety demands such identification.

As Lawson himself recounted in a fascinating video-essay posted on [Vimeo](#) circa 2008, after initially being stopped by the police and requested for identification while at a party and gradually discovering the ubiquity of this experience among “black, brown, and young” friends, Lawson committed to challenging this ID law, § 647(e), an injustice he would later liken to the apartheid “pass laws” of South Africa.⁷⁸ Subsequent encounters with the police during this time were a mix of unplanned happenings and willed challenges, much like Claudette Colvin’s and Rosa Parks’ respective scenes of resistance against bus segregation in Montgomery, Alabama. In any event, Lawson’s dark skin and dreadlocked hair were interpreted by San Diego police

⁷⁸ Recall this thesis’s Introduction on a long tradition (from the 1960s to the present) of theorizing the racial, political-economic, and socio-legal order of southern California *as* apartheid.

officers (and other unofficially deputized defenders of “the public safety”) as signs of difference and danger, his movement as itinerance and disorder (cf. Walcott 2021), and his refusal to properly “account for his presence” as insolence and disrespect for the law, within an imagined geography of “white public space” (Hill 1998) encompassing much of California and the greater U.S. empire. Indeed, police officers in California were authorized by the state’s penal code to do so: to interpret the presence of a person such as Lawson in accordance within “surrounding circumstances,” to solicit identification and an “account” from such a person, and moreover to make an arrest for noncooperation. Race, though unmentioned, indexically saturates both the text of the penal code and the scene of the police stop (cf. Roberts 1999; Smalls 2020).

Edward Lawson was in many ways an exceptional person: risking arrest and representing himself *pro per* in court (mostly because high-powered law firms and legal advocacy groups like ACLU had each, in different manners of speaking, declined to take his case) up until reaching the Supreme Court, his campaign eventually became a *cause célèbre* for “just about everybody who was anybody in the progressive, liberal, or civil rights community.” (Lawson’s distinct intellect, personality, style, and theorizations of racism and law are vividly on display in a number of appearances on Oprah Winfrey and Larry King’s television shows throughout the 1980s and early ‘90s and in the more recent video-essay.) However, Lawson’s treatment by police was of course all-too-unexceptional, part of a long history of racialized and racist governance in the United States (see, e.g., Gooding-Williams 1993; Carbado 2002; James 2007; Muhammad 2010; Browne 2015), with the terrible caveat that many other Black people don’t live to tell the tale of encounters with U.S. law enforcement.

And U.S. courts have only rarely sided with people like Lawson who have challenged the law and order of police authority, overwhelmingly deferring to the presupposed honesty and

expert judgment of police officers over and against counterclaims of police wrongdoing and lies (Lvovsky 2017; Dunkle 2021). Indeed, Lawson “lost” and “lost” and “lost” his challenges to the law, until winning in the federal Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and, upon further challenge from the San Diego Police Department, winning again in the U.S. Supreme Court.⁷⁹ Writing for the majority in *Kolender v. Lawson* (1983), Justice Sandra Day O’Connor held that “§ 647(e) is unconstitutionally vague on its face because it encourages arbitrary enforcement by failing to describe with sufficient particularity what a suspect must do in order to satisfy the statute.” Celebrated by Lawson and many others as a major civil rights victory, the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Kolender v. Lawson* on grounds of the “void-for-vagueness” doctrine—as opposed to Justice William J. Brennan’s more expansive concurring argument, based on Fourth Amendment protections against search and seizure, for instance—fits squarely within what I characterize as an emerging “accountability” paradigm. Though an important response to what O’Connor and others characterized as police “discretion,” a competing legal-language ideology, the void-for-vagueness doctrine has persistently maintained intact the institutional basis for police abuse while routing (or co-opting) subsequent public challenge into a nearly interminable loop of “accountability” talk and procedure.

As in common law traditions generally,⁸⁰ the void-for-vagueness doctrine emerged in fits and starts, as arguments expressed in official decisions of courts of various jurisdictions (state, federal) and various levels (district, appellate, etc.) but also in dissenting opinions—always one interpretation of particular situations and particular statutes in competition with others, and not

⁷⁹ § 647(e) was amended, most recently in 2008, to govern “lodg[ing] in any building, structure, vehicle, or place, whether public or private, without the permission of the owner or person entitled to the possession or in control of it.” In its current form, this section of the Penal Code is central to what the ACLU of California (2021) has called the state’s “legal war against unhoused people” and squatters.

⁸⁰ In his study of the rise of common law in early modern Britain, Bradin Cormack (2007) has detailed the “fundamentally improvisational” quality of legal jurisdiction, the “unfolding” of law “into doctrine only as and through practice,” an analysis consonant with this chapter’s semiotic approach.

always the interpretation carrying the day. Iterative citation of precedent—a practice of entextualized indexicality—can then turn instance of legal argument into a more and more formalized doctrine (cf. Briggs & Bauman 1992; Nakassis 2013), as judges read and cite other courts’ decisions as well as other jurisprudential commentary. By and large, as it was getting consolidated as doctrine, concern about vagueness (or the “uncertain” and “indefinite”) in the U.S. judiciary emerged in cases in which a written legal statute was found to insufficiently specify either the kinds of action able to be deemed against the law (sometimes, though not always, “criminal”) or the latitude of law enforcement officers in interpreting and policing such actions in everyday practice (Note 1960; Lvovsky 2017). Yet, one much-cited study in the *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* suggested that a thorough recounting of prior case history could “compel the conclusion that in the great majority of instances the concept of vagueness is an available instrument in the service of other more determinative judicially felt needs and pressures” (Note 1960: 75). Semiotically, the “concept of vagueness” in U.S. law could then be understood as a metapragmatic (regimented and consciously “available”) means of achieving more contextually immediate ends, including deciding a case one way or another, and of mediating larger political projects—among these democracy, capitalism, white supremacy, empire, liberty, equality, justice, and the rule of law, exemplary ideological formulations that have sometimes articulated together and other times competed, many named but a few (now) mostly disavowed.

Consider the Supreme Court’s elaboration in *Kolender v. Lawson* of the by-then-established doctrine, grounded in “the meaning of the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”⁸¹ In Justice O’Connor’s opinion for the Court:

⁸¹ Early legal scholarship on the matter (Note 1948: 278) traced how, after the U.S. Civil War and the passage of the Reconstruction amendments to the U.S. Constitution in the 1860s, jurists began to associate the void-for-vagueness doctrine less with principles of legislative clarity (which, if lacking, could make a given statute attractive for judicial

As generally stated, the void-for-vagueness doctrine requires that a penal statute define the criminal offense with sufficient definiteness that ordinary people can understand what conduct is prohibited and in a manner that does not encourage arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement. *Hoffman Estates v. Flipside, Hoffman Estates, Inc.*, *supra*; *Smith v. Goguen*, 415 U. S. 566 (1974); *Grayned v. City of Rockford*, 408 U. S. 104 (1972); *Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville*, 405 U. S. 156 (1972); *Connally v. General Construction Co.*, 269 U. S. 385 (1926). Although the doctrine focuses both on actual notice to citizens and arbitrary enforcement, we have recognized recently that the more important aspect of the vagueness doctrine “is not actual notice, but the other principal element of the doctrine — the requirement that a legislature establish minimal guidelines to govern law enforcement.” *Smith*, 415 U.S. at 415 U. S. 574. Where the legislature fails to provide such minimal guidelines, a criminal statute may permit “a standardless sweep [that] allows policemen, prosecutors, and juries to pursue their personal predilections.” *Id.* at 415 U. S. 575.

Section 647(e), as presently drafted and as construed by the state courts, contains no standard for determining what a suspect has to do in order to satisfy the requirement to provide a “credible and reliable” identification. As such, the statute vests virtually complete discretion in the hands of the police to determine whether the suspect has satisfied the statute and must be permitted to go on his way in the absence of probable cause to arrest... (*Kolender v. Lawson* 1983: 357-358)

Along with the Court’s pattern of citing precedent cases—some of which had been invoked by the appellant (*Kolender*, then San Diego’s Chief of Police) and respondent (*Lawson*) parties in arguing *their* case—a parallel formulation between what is “generally stated” and what “we have recognized recently” presupposes and entails the Court’s authority to pronounce upon law, as part of the interdiscursive construction of the legal decision (and the U.S. Supreme Court decision, specifically) as a speech event. More important still is the ensuing metapragmatic commentary, formulated in *Smith v. Goguen* and cited in *Kolender v. Lawson*, on the proper making and enforcing of law. The Court’s doctrinal standard (in these two cases, at least) requires that legislative language include “minimal guidelines to govern law enforcement,” much like philosopher of language H. Paul Grice’s (1975) maxims of quantity and quality. Justice

striking-down, in an emergent federal and multi-branch division of governance) and more with citizens’ right to due process, entextualized for the first time in U.S. law in the Constitution’s Fifth Amendment and expanded to all persons in Fourteenth Amendment.

O'Connor pragmatically positions these “minimal guidelines,” presupposable as written in *enough, clear enough* language to be understandable to “ordinary people” and law enforcement agents alike, as opposite and counterbalance to the “virtually complete discretion” and thus “arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement of law” by police, prosecutors, or juries potentially arising in the absence of sufficiently definite policy.

This metapragmatic discourse signals the importance of a related phenomenon, “discretion,” which one scholar has called the “fraternal twin” of “vagueness” (Post 1994: 492). “Discretion” might best be understood as an ideology indexing flexibility, responsiveness, and strength of action for executors and enforcers of law (on the street) as an entailment of minimally restrictive statutory language (on the books). An ideology of language as much as law, “discretion” displaces the site of governmental authority from the legislature or judiciary to executive or police agents. “Discretion” had and has its advocates, among them the late-20th century’s most eminent criminologists and legal scholars (e.g., Remington 1965; Wilson 1968; Goldstein 1977), advancing a certain realist/empiricist claim that “this is how it is”—there is no “criminal justice system,” only individuals evaluating context and acting out roles, the story goes (compellingly, in many respects)—as well as other ideological propositions about safety, law and order, and occasionally the evils or inefficiencies of bureaucracy (cf. Walker 1993). Though perhaps only the most zealous would champion “virtually complete” police discretion, Black radicals and others have long diagnosed a healthy, homegrown, widely institutionalized tradition of American fascism (e.g., Jackson 1972; Marable 1985; Toscano 2020) with no shortage of zeal (see also the luridly and revealingly fantastical 1971 film *Dirty Harry*). Indeed, the Court’s acknowledgment of the rationale offered by representatives of the San Diego Police Department (i.e., *Kolender*) takes up the evocatively pathologizing description of the public problem the

police avowedly address: “Appellants stress the need for strengthened law enforcement tools to combat the epidemic of crime that plagues our Nation” (*Kolender v. Lawson* 1983: 361; cf. Muhammad 2010).

But, of course, the appellants lost this case. The Court continued: “The concern of our citizens with curbing criminal activity is certainly a matter requiring the attention of all branches of government. As weighty as this concern is, however, it cannot justify legislation that would otherwise fail to meet constitutional standards for definiteness and clarity” (*Kolender v. Lawson* 1983: 361). Justice O’Connor’s argument is exemplary in “contrast[ing] a system of rules with unanalyzable contextual factors,” the language-ideological “bias” identified by Bernard Weissbourd and Elizabeth Mertz (1985: 649) as permeating the U.S., indeed “Western,” “legal system.” Yet, while this “viewpoint downplays, in the language of semiotics, the ‘pragmatic’ or context-bound elements” of the historically-occurring events on trial (Weissbourd & Mertz 1985: 649), it too is dialectically produced through the pragmatic and metapragmatic processes that are often obscured from conscious awareness. The overarching goal of this chapter, hence, is to discover what can be learned by taking seriously the indexical and contextual factors of legal language, even when obscured.

In this light, I argue that *Kolender v. Lawson* and the void-for-vagueness doctrine do not represent an attack by the Supreme Court on police “discretion” so much as an evolution. Note the Court’s scaled objection to only “virtually complete discretion” (and a “standardless sweep”), indexically signaling otherwise acceptable or desirable degrees of discretion and standards. Police discretion was moderated but also extended, I argue, by an emergent framework of “accountability,” at once subtending and subtended by decisions like *Kolender v. Lawson*. Indeed, I read an important through-line between the *Kolender v. Lawson* case and a

state-of-the-field report penned by the criminologist George L. Kelling (1999) for the National Institute of Justice—and its wider audience of police department executives—entitled “*Broken Windows*” and *Police Discretion*.⁸² Among Kelling’s topics is the “art of developing guidelines,” presumably above the minimal threshold required by the Supreme Court’s vagueness doctrine, “essential to the development of police accountability and professionalism” (1999: 9), professionalism being one of the earliest and most successful slogans of police expansion *qua* reform (Murakawa 2014). By this time, a concept of “accountability” had evidently been formulated and taken up in policing spheres (see Ch. 1). Kelling’s report elaborates further:

Despite the complexity of police work, generic sets of guidelines about the substantive problems with which police deal—for example, disorderly behavior in a downtown area—can be developed. Such guidelines can serve as the basis for police training, supervision, and practice; identify competent police work and provide the basis for officer accountability; help to articulate a genuinely professional police point of view; and, yes, even be used to defend police actions in litigation. (Kelling 1999: 18)

If “guidelines” for law enforcement action are to be a constitutional (or, differently, a Supreme Court) requirement after *Smith* and *Kolender*, Kelling’s report articulates how they might be made friendly to the “professional police point of view” (presupposed or entailed?)—and, when need be, to courts. These proposed “accountability standards” would formalize a layer of interpretive discretion above that of the street-level cop, intending to enable police department “supervisors and administrators to distinguish between officers who operate within the rules and yet behave in an uncaring and incompetent fashion, and officers who bend or break the rules and yet behave in a caring manner” (1999: 44). Competent police officers may “bend or break the rules” at their discretion, as long as they care (about what? about whom?) in ways legible and convincing to their superiors—and, when need be, to judges and juries.

⁸² With James Q. Wilson, Kelling had earlier developed the paradigm of “broken windows” policing, one of the most influential ideological innovations in U.S. policing in the 20th century (cf. Camp & Heatherton 2016).

Although jurisprudential commonsense in recent decades has understood (presupposed as already-established) the “core concern” of the U.S. Supreme Court’s vagueness doctrine in *Kolender v. Lawson* and citationally-linked cases to be “preserving legislative accountability over questions of criminal policy” (Lvovsky 2017: 2002), I suggest reading Kelling’s proposal as insight into an ideological workaround to the problems posed to police by the void-for-vagueness doctrine and its apparent burden on entextualized law over excessive discretionary action.⁸³

Kelling’s ideas for how to make “guidelines” work to improve and defend (rather than regulate and restrict) police action—effectively, to secure police discretion within a framework of police “accountability”—casts in a strange light the post-hoc framing of void-for-vagueness doctrine *for or as* “accountability,” a jurisprudential move enregistered with a dominant U.S. civic ideology of ideal democratic governance (see also Sunstein 1996). In an article on “Democratic Policing,” for instance, Barry Friedman and Maria Pomamarenko (2015)—legal scholars with New York University’s Policing Project, frequently assailed by the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021b, 2022a, 2022b) as epitomizing “academic complicity” with the carceral state—invoke “accountability” as follows:

Under the classical separation-of-powers model, democratically accountable legislators set down the laws that individuals are expected to follow; officials within the executive branch enforce these laws; and independent courts determine whether what the other branches did was authorized and permitted by law. (Friedman & Pomamarenko 2015: 1838)

Because legislators are (or ought to be) “accountable” to—or “placed and displaceable” by (in the words of Jeremy Bentham, quoted in Binder & Fissell 2019: 1551)—voting citizens, at least in this theory, legislatures are (or ought to be) entitled and obligated to craft the laws and policies that ‘ordinary people’ are obligated to respect and officials such as police are expected to

⁸³ It is easy to imagine that more police executives across the U.S. have read Kelling’s report and other similar texts circulated by and through particular networks and institutions, central among them the National Institute of Justice, more closely and more regularly than most legal scholarship or even most Supreme Court decisions.

enforce. This much coheres with the *Kolender v. Lawson* ruling. Implicit, too, in the writing of (sufficiently definite) policies and guidelines—and, above all, the hallowed writing and amending of the U.S. Constitution—is an entextualized standard available for subsequently comparing against (most likely competing) reports of prior scenes of legal/police action. This task of comparison is normatively imagined, in the “separation-of-powers model,” as the purview of “independent” courts, especially when faced with public complaint and challenge like Lawson’s against the perceived failure of the “law of the land” or the “law of the street” to comply with the higher law enshrined in the Bill of Rights and the rest of the Constitution. Among the expected (hoped-for or feared) entailments of adjudication could be changes in policy, such as the striking-down of legal statutes, or the displacement and removal of offending personnel.

Yet, what if this model of democratic, civil rights-protecting governance is not only historically inaccurate (as many ideals might unsurprisingly be) but also theoretically problematic on its own terms? As other legal scholars have written of the era in which Lawson and so many others were so routinely and excessively stopped by police and made to account for their presence:

The courts held police accountable to civil rights norms in the cases that reached them, but these represented only a very small fraction of police activity. In principle, electoral control of local government held police accountable, but the political levers—appointment of top-level officials and budgetary control—were crude, and voters and civilian officials had limited information. (Sabel & Simon 2016: 186)

The situation may very well have gotten worse since the 1970s and ‘80s, with the astronomical expansion of policing and the U.S. carceral apparatus (Gilmore 2007; Camp & Heatherton 2016), the rise of a competing “qualified immunity” doctrine (protecting police discretion as exceptional to even definite or non-vague law and policy), and the dual-track consolidation of

“accountability” within courts as well as within police departments (Kelling 1999) or their institutional affiliates: e.g., the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners, which the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a: 83) identifies as a “fraudulent ‘oversight’ body” and seeks to abolish. As even Friedman and Ponamarenko (2015: 1877) have put plainly, “Today, we kid ourselves if we believe both the rule of law and democratic accountability are satisfied when courts govern policing.” Police department self-governance and purportedly independent “oversight” boards are only more egregious.

What, then, should be made of the construal of *Kolender v. Lawson* as a victory for “accountability”—a keyword and framework that (though unmentioned by the Supreme Court in 1983) has become increasingly ideologically dominant in the decades since, even as many liberal, progressive, and radical legal commentators differently point to “accountability” as a democratic ideal that is routinely unmet but no less worth pursuing? I want to argue that the problem is not that *Kolender v. Lawson*, George Kelling’s proposal for police “guidelines,” and contemporary legal scholars’ aspirations to “accountability” and “democratic policing” each refer to different remedies to different needs but instead that they presuppose too much the same about the legal order and hence similarly entail continued license for police discretion and violence. The problem is not that “accountability” is a vague and insufficiently definite concept but that, as concerns the police, its implications are far too narrow and self-defeating for contemporary social movements seeking justice. These implications are most clear, I suggest, from a semiotic analysis of “accountability.”

iv. Abolition Semiotics

This chapter has offered a preliminary semiotic analysis of the linguistic and ideological dimensions of two problems of police “accountability.” First, I addressed the apparent “pivot” to the slogan “accountability” as a way to obfuscate the relationships of a technology firm to policing, at a historical juncture when “accountability” is also a popular demand of public protest against policing and other social institutions (including many a technology firm). Second, I proposed something like one genealogical route for the emergence of an ideal of “accountability” within the juridical and jurisprudential history of the “void-for-vagueness doctrine” in U.S. courts and attendant debates about proper forms of police discretion within democratic government. From my analysis of these phenomena, I will offer the briefest sketch of a semiotic model of “accountability” as first and foremost invoked and instantiated (such as it is) through language practices, specifically metapragmatic discourse.⁸⁴ Though the word “accountability” could be used by many different kinds of people for many different kinds of purposes, I suggest a schema of three language functions that are (with different emphases, in different configurations) persistently presupposed or entailed in the ideal or practice of “accountability”: *narrative*, *process*, and *consequence*.

Narrative names the metapragmatic organization of indexical signs about a “contingent, realtime, historical happening,” or what is pragmatically (re)presented as such, into a text (Silverstein 1993); it involves more than indexing who does (or has done) what, where and when, to or around whom, but not usually less (Ochs & Capps 2001; Hill 2005). Narrative occurs across multiple, nested sites (Philips 2000), e.g., in a police officer’s insistence that Edward

⁸⁴ The public administration scholar Michael Harmon (1995) once outlined a “paradox of accountability” in government service—between an obligation to respect higher authority and to practice personal responsibility—manageable so long as “accountability is chiefly construed as a process of dialogue” (cf. Roberts 2002).

Lawson “account for” his presence on a San Diego street, in Lawson’s version of these events in his arguments to a court, in the Supreme Court’s retelling of both the initial 15 police stops and also Lawson’s (and the San Diego Police Department’s) in the decision to *Kolender v. Lawson*, and in my own historicizing of all the above.

Process names the organization of speech into interactional and institutional channels, procedures, and rituals (Silverstein 2004); it is formalized in the U.S. constitutional guarantee of legal “due process,” but extends more widely along Roman Jakobson (1960) and later anthropologists (Elyachar 2010; Lemon 2017) have theorized as the phatic function of language. Tracey Meares—a prominent legal scholar, former member of President Obama’s Task Force on 21st-Century Policing, and advocate of “procedural justice”—offers an exemplary invocation of extralegal processuality in writing, “Rather than hoping to specify implementation of police discretion through hyper-precise rules, what the court should do is open and reinforce the channels of political accountability between the community and the police” (1998: 1348).⁸⁵ Though Meares emphasizes the difference between accountability “channels” and a “rules”-based order, both are competing forms of process—indeed, nested processes.

In this formulation of accountability, I treat *narrative* as a discrete (but iterable) speech-event concerning a wider set of (preceding, ongoing, or anticipated) social actions and experiences and *process* as the configuration of multiple speech-events and social actions into a discrete, more-or-less institutionalized entity.

Consequence names the indexing of what is or isn’t, could or couldn’t, ought or oughtn’t entail from narrativity and processuality. Consequence is a more general function than what

⁸⁵ Alex Vitale ([2017] 2021: 247) names Meares among the leading experts who have “adopted some of the rhetoric of police abolition,” by way of “misrepresent[ing] the nature of the movement by claiming that what people are really asking for is more diverse and better-trained police forces” and, in some cases, “belittl[ing] the [abolitionist] movement as hopelessly naïve and incapable of implementing the changes activists are calling for because they just don’t understand the complexities of police contracts and civil services rules.”

could be called *efficacy*, which involves a more tightly regimented (hence “effective”) link between goal, means, and ends (Silverstein 1979; Woolard 1998: 10-11); every act is consequential but only some are consequential in intended ways. Court verdicts, whether in *Kolender v. Lawson* or in the trial of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, are a paradigmatic and highly ritualized genre of consequentiality, but consequence is also indexed in more prosaic ways. The presupposition of entailment, or *possible* entailment, is no less paradoxical for being an everyday semiotic practice (cf. Silverstein 2003) or for sometimes being as effective as desired.

I interpret the indexing of these functions of “accountability” in the data-work of PredPol/Geolitica as much as in the civil rights campaign of Edward Lawson, the proposals of George Kelling, the “oversight” of the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners, or the demands of millions of protesters on U.S. streets in 2020: narrating events of police interaction, in specific institutional processes, with an array of imagined and desired possible effects. These functions of “accountability” are semiotically organized in the same ways, even if the political aims are quite at odds. Indeed, narrative and (less so) process are functionally achieved in language in the moment of their occurrence—as opposed to consequence, which interdiscursively concerns effects nearer or farther in the future. Hence, consequential difference is all too easily erased from view of the the most easily iconized (or, more technically, *rhematized*) and most persistently similar narrative and processual functions of “accountability” across otherwise different socio-political practices (cf. Irvine & Gal 2000; Gal & Irvine 2019).

This pattern holds true even for the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2022a), which emphasizes its own “accountability” to community in Los Angeles and especially in Skid Row, probably the city’s most impoverished and most intensely policed neighborhood,⁸⁶ at the same

⁸⁶ For histories of abolitionist activism in Skid Row, see the essential work of Deshonay Dozier (2019, 2022).

time as the Coalition explicitly refuses to seek “accountability” with the LAPD or the Los Angeles Board of Police Commissioners. The Coalition regularly narrates its work and its findings to many community members in Skid Row—in formal and informal but either way rigorously maintained channels of collaboration, comradeship, and friendship, especially oriented around the community-formed Los Angeles Community Action Network [LA CAN]—with the explicit expectation that Coalition members take action to comply with expressed community wishes. Though pursuing “accountability” with LAPD could involve quite similar narrative and processual patterns, the forms of consequence to which the Coalition pointedly commits with community would never, they recognize and argue, be possible with police. To actually end police violence in all its forms—insist the Coalition and the ever-expanding movement of which it is part—would require abolition, not police “accountability.”

Narrative, in process, generating consequence: these functions are imagined (by many if not most proponents of “accountability”) to be presupposed and entailed together, or even able to be regimented into cycles of entailment by the invocation of the “accountability” slogan. Yet, as prison/police abolitionist movements know well—much like what has been theorized through the distinction of reformist and non-reformist reforms (Gilmore 2017; Critical Resistance 2020; Akbar 2020)—calls for, commitments to, and programs of “accountability” too often strengthen and expand the policing institutions and institutional practices that many (but hardly all) of those seeking “accountability” would seemingly desire to constrain or end. Following the lead of the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2022a), I argue that the most pertinent and powerful co-optation in play in policing reform discourse is not the apparent uptake or appropriation of protest slogans by technology firms or progressive legal officials, for example, but rather the prior and even less

controversial (though only ever partial) enclosure of protest desire/demand within the legal-institutional and metapragmatic frame of “accountability.” This argument casts the idealized presuppositional configuration of narrative-process-consequence in stark new light and reveals the semiotic underpinnings of the ideological/strategic debate over whether “police accountability” is even possible or desirable within the existing (powerfully presupposed) legal-political systems of the United States.

My thinking here relies on two key anthropological theorizations of enclosure. Damien Sojoyner (2016, 2017: 521) has located *enclosure* as a set of carceral techniques in Black Los Angeles that “negate alternative social visions presented by Black radical forms of indigenous knowledge [... and] employ reform-based practices that incorporate obedient and nonthreatening forms of racial, gender, and sexed difference to prevent the exposure and consequential undoing of highly oppressive forms of governance that are key to the liberal project.” Across this thesis I have documented many such negations, especially at the University.

More abstractly, Paul Kockelman (2013: 84) has offered a semiotic analysis of *enclosure* as “putting an artificial analytic boundary (or ‘frame’) around one particular semiotic process (or bundle of semiotic processes), and thereby eliding (or emphasizing) the many other semiotic processes (and attendant agents) that had a hand (or say) in its genesis or outcome.” Its other, for Kockelman (2007, 2013), is *disclosure*, the breaking open of semiotic boundaries and unfolding of the externally knowable from within the frame. This is the logic of ethnography and critical theory, or especially of publicity as event. In Kockelman’s (2007: 304) general schema *disclosure* requires *enclosure* not only as “condition” (to break open) but also as “consequence.” That is, disclosures of knowledge dynamically produce new, different enclosures of knowledge.

Perhaps more than most other organizations of knowledge, the metapragmatic discourse and institutionalized regime of “accountability” in and around policing, as tracked in this thesis, appears iconically redolent of (public, narrative, even scandalous) disclosures while all the while routing any and all knowledge of police harm into (public, processual) enclosures that secure the status quo precisely by holding out the possibility for forms of consequence that can never fully be realized. This is the semiotics of reformist incorporation, one face of counterinsurgency in today’s Los Angeles.

The Stop LAPD Spying Coalition (2021a, 2021b, 2022a) and many others have already begun exposing and opposing “accountability” efforts that “normalize and expand” the criminal punishment system and its surveillance/counterinsurgency apparatus. As a matter of course, the movement toward abolishing prisons and the police—and the larger societal conditions against which prisons and policing came to be seen as solutions (Gilmore 2007, 2022)—will and must also confront the legal and language ideologies holding U.S. (and transnational) carceral architectures in place. This chapter represents a small effort to clarify the semiotic basis of a few such obstacles to abolition, justice, and freedom and to draw insights from the struggles underway to overcome them.

Conclusion

In an interview with the local TV news station KTLA on the 30th anniversary of the beating of Rodney King, Congresswoman Karen Bass told KTLA reporter Eric Spillman: “Many of us who had been trying to convince the public that these kinds of incidences were happening were almost relieved. It was like: Finally, finally, it was on camera. And the world was gonna be able to see. And we would finally be able to hold police officers accountable” (KTLA 2021; cf. Bass 2021). The news segment quickly cut from the interview with Rep. Bass to archival footage of Rodney King, bruised, bloodied, and swollen, wheeled in a wheelchair shortly after the events of March 3, 1991. “I thought they were gonna kill me, that’s what I thought,” he says to the TV interviewers assembled at the hospital where he recovered, a rare victim of carceral violence able to speak an account of his injury at all or be listened to. Another cut, in the brisk aesthetics of TV journalism, brings then-LAPD Chief Daryl F. Gates to the fore. “And if it turns out that this is excessive in nature, we will take very stern action to deal with it,” Gates says, in the immediate aftermath, voicing the organization’s promise of accountability.

But, of course, the “finally” of publicity never materialized as the “finally” of consequence, and the promise of accountability was not to be. The three-decade time warp in which Rep. Karen Bass’s retrospective hope/confidence in accountability breaks down over Rodney King’s still if all-too-surprisingly live body discloses the persistence of “the prevailing oppression” as well as the persistence of accountability as a fantasy of public reckoning and repair that amounts—through the semiotic subterfuge of pragmatic implication—most of all to institutional reorder and reform.

This pattern has repeated time and again, as I have aimed to demonstrate in this thesis. First, I mapped some of the many forms of collaboration and contestation between universities and policing in the United States since the 1960s, focused in particular on entanglements between UCLA and the LAPD. Second, I assessed the emergence of the “accountability” ideal in U.S. jurisprudence, legal doctrine and commentary, policing policies, and reform agendas. I proposed an analysis of the institutional co-optation of anti-policing protest and complaint as enabled by specific semiotic functions of accountability procedures and discourses. Intersecting frequently and with significant effect across this period are histories of law and order, racism and race, political economy, social science, and social movement. To understand, for instance, the rise and fall of PredPol and its transformation into an “accountability” software—as well as the persistence and advancement of social movements fighting for the abolition of all data-driven policing (indeed, all policing) in Los Angeles, at UCLA, and beyond—has required keeping all these dimensions in view together. But exposing the oversights of oversight, I argue, need not *and must not* fall into the liberal logic of publicity, like that espoused with only the slightest tinge of futility or regret by Congresswoman Karen Bass, whose subsequent mayoral campaign (even though heavily opposed by police officers) would call for proposals that would normalize and expand the power of the same LAPD that assaulted Rodney King and so many other *damnés* like him (Zahniser 2022). Who ever said knowledge was necessarily power?

Here I have taken inspiration from the likes of the Student Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam and Stop LAPD Spying Coalition, who in different eras and in different ways have practiced a politics of disclosure that is always pragmatically and explicitly oriented to a politics of ending and abolishing war “abroad” and war “at home” and making peace and freedom in their stead. If knowledge tethered to accountability as oversight can leave the

prevailing oppression untouched and unbothered, disclosed knowledge like the kind Stop LAPD Spying Coalition pursues may yet assist in recognizing and undoing the terms and mapping and unmapping the territory of this apartheid order.

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